

FROM THE BOOKS OF  
Joel E. McCrum

*The*  
**RATIONAL HIND**

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

EVERED

BLACK PAWL

THRIFTY STOCK and Other Stories

AUDACITY

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

*The*  
RATIONAL HIND

BY  
BEN AMES WILLIAMS  
AUTHOR OF "THRIFTY STOCK," "AUDACITY," ETC.



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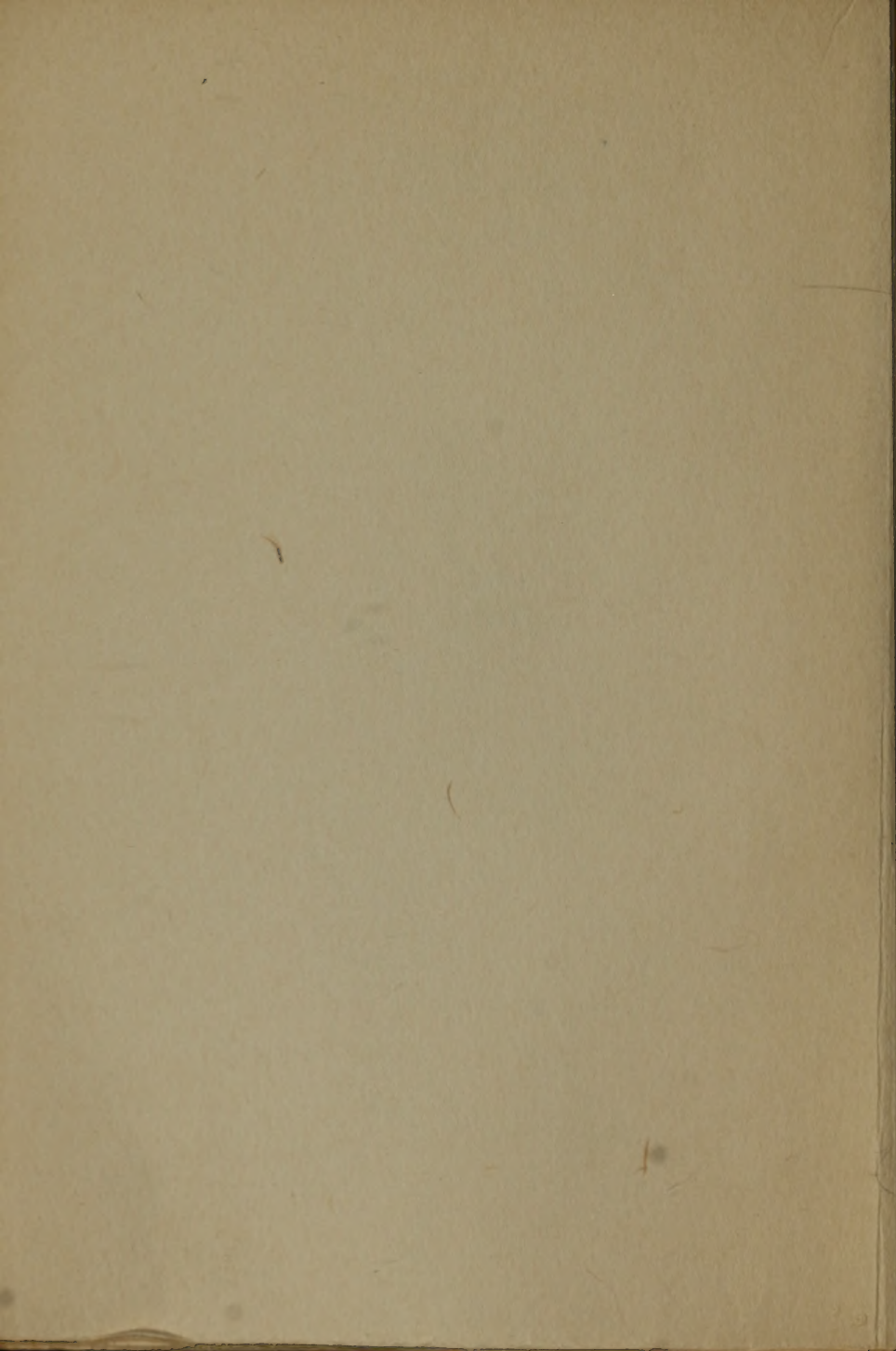
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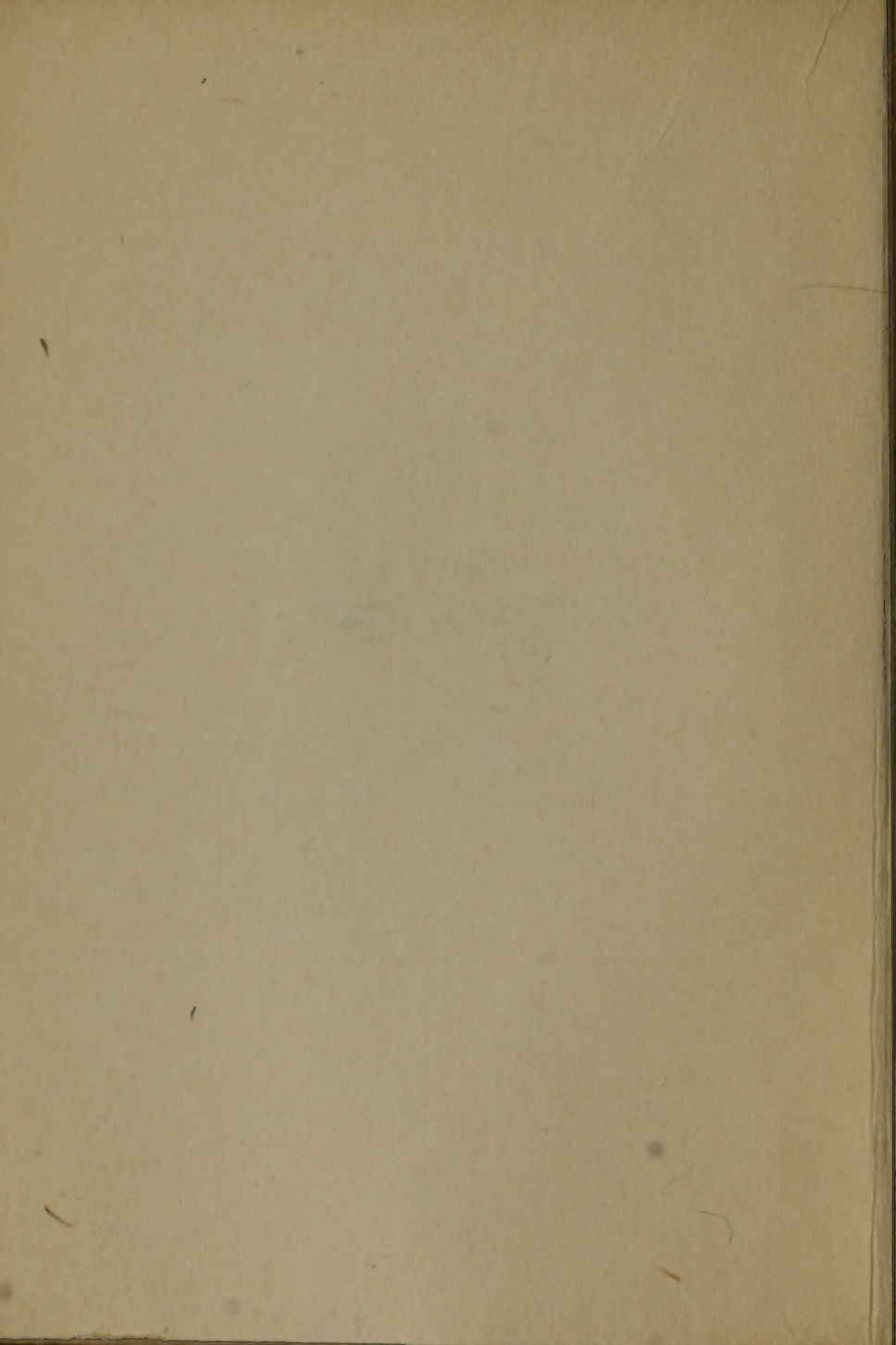
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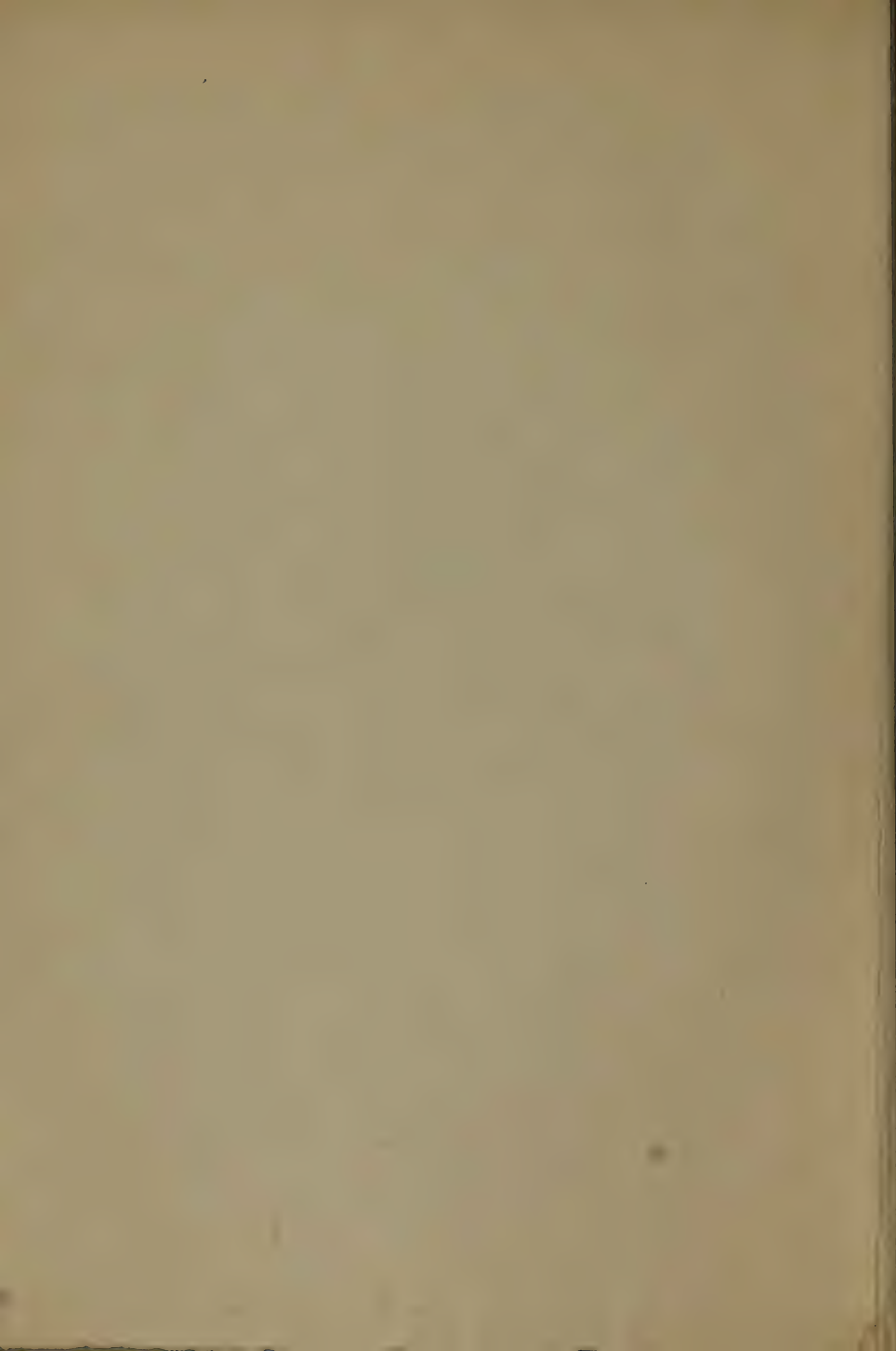
TO  
FATHER



*The*  
**RATIONAL HIND**



## PART I



## THE RATIONAL HIND

UP behind the Bartlett Woods, where they lie like a black shadow along the slope of the ridge, there is a small bog thickly grown with alders and swamp cedar. The ground itself is full of water, and springs must feed the place, for in the hottest summer it is never even relatively dry. About the middle of the bog, well hidden by cedars and almost inaccessible to man, a small patch of open water, black as ink and full of weeds and mold, mirrors day by day the blue or the white or the gray sky overhead. The outlet of this pond, beginning as a seepage through the grass roots, becomes a chuckling little trickle, acquiring cleanly habits of its own, and winds its way through the Bartlett Woods, and through a notch in the ridge, and down the slope until it emerges into the open at the upper end of the pasture on the old Dillard farm. Other little brooklets—this slope is full of springs—have fed it full; it is hereabouts a considerable stream, where trout may be taken. Cattle stand in the pools, knee deep, meditatively switching at the flies and the mosquitoes; the brook swirls about their legs, shakes itself in the shallows below as though to be rid of contamination and, bright and clean again dives into the cool shadow under the wooden bridge west of the Dillard house to emerge into Marshall's Meadows, below the road.

Here it is known as Marshall Brook. Perhaps a mile of its course still remains to it before it empties into a deservedly anonymous body of water to the eastward, a pond not a quarter mile across in any direction, shallow and stagnant and surrounded by quagmires where moose like to browse.

About a dozen rods below the bridge, the brook's course, which has been easterly, curves to the north; and on the inner side of this curve the bank falls away, leaving a pool of water shaped roughly like the head of a whaler's toggle iron, its single barb turned backward. Within this barb there is a slow eddy; it is a backwater, untouched by the main stream. Upon a warm summer's afternoon, when the trout do not respond to your invitation, it is pleasant to sit in the shelter of a young clump of gray birch beside the pool and idly watch the behavior of the drift in this backwater. There are always little bits of wood afloat in it; there is apt to be a thin sheet of foamy scum. At first glance this seems to be altogether without movement, except that the disturbance of the passing stream sends faint ripples which make the drift and the dirty foam sluggishly rise and fall. There is no apparent current at all; it is necessary to take sights along a grass blade or against a pebble on the opposite bank before you can be sure that there is indeed a slow, rotary movement of the water, even in this backwater; the drift does indolently revolve upon itself. It is seldom that any of it escapes into the flow of the stream; a single twig, conspicuous by reason of some eccentricity of shape, will

sometimes be found here day after day until it becomes waterlogged and sinks, to rot away upon the bottom, already thickly carpeted with oozy mold. Once in a while a traveling muskrat turns into this peaceful corner; the effect is like a convulsion. The foam is torn; drift which has been here for days is dislodged and caught by the current and swept away; minutes after the creature has departed, traces of his visit still persist in the disturbed and disordered surface of the eddy. But in the course of time the twigs and chips and all the drift fall into their ordered places once more, and resume their slow revolutions, till of their own weight they sink and rot away.

There are such backwaters a little aside from the great stream of life. Sometimes a whole community, sometimes a neighborhood, sometimes a single house assumes these characteristics; the people who dwell therein draw imperceptibly apart from the stream; the ripples wakened by the outer current faintly disturb them without dislodging them; they revolve upon themselves, content with themselves, ignoring the world. In the huge scheme of things it is ordained that men and women thus withdrawn from life must free themselves from their seclusion—or slowly rot and die.

## I

The old Dillard house stands on a little knoll above the road, on the lower slopes of the ridge which is topped by Bartlett's Woods. A Nathan Dillard built it, in the heart of the broad lands granted him by General Knox, under whom he had

served gallantly in the Revolutionary wars. The brick in the ends of the house and in the chimney were painfully imported from England; likewise the weather boards. Hand-hewed pegs held the massive frame; hand-forged nails pinned the boards in their places. Save for a certain mellowing which it has acquired with years, it stands today unchanged, stout and staunch and strong.

The house is, for its locality, a large one. Between Fraternity and East Harbor, and rather nearer the former, it lifts an impressive bulk, bright against the dark shadow of the woods upon the ridge. Late afternoon suns gild its white flanks warmly. The brick ends of the house are painted like the weather-boarding; there are no blinds upon the windows; the structure is starkly square and uncompromising, only the huge chimney rising above the ridge pole to break the box-like outlines. On the west side, a one-story woodshed, likewise painted white, connects with the barn. This has of late years been shingled over the siding, and the shingles have been permitted to weather to a dark-gray tone broken by streaks of rusty brown. The barn is not so large as the house; and you may measure the size of the house by this fact; for about Fraternity a man's house is usually small and all compacted, his barn vast and roomy to accommodate a six months' store of hay.

This is a house with a backbone. The chimney is its spine. This chimney, some ten or twelve feet square, is in the middle of the house, and the rooms are grouped about it as a center. On the side toward the road the front door admits the

visitor to a small hall where cramped stairs climb anglingly. To the right is the heart of the house, the huge kitchen. Half its east wall is occupied by the chimney, the old ovens built in at one side, the fireplace long since sheathed out of sight, when a stove replaced more primitive methods of cooking. Afternoon suns pour into this room; it is in winter bright and warm and gay. The bare, scrubbed floor has a raw cleanliness about it, broken only by braided or hooked rugs here and there. Meals are served upon a small table, which betweenwhiles, is pushed against the wall and covered with a red, flowered cloth. In the rear of the house is a more formal dining-room. An old mahogany table and cane-seated mahogany chairs brought from England by that ancient Nathan Dillard stand here in lonely state. They are polished till they shine, day by day; but it is seldom that any use profanes them. The front parlor, in the east end of the house and on the side toward the road, is likewise a sanctuary. It contains an old organ, a haircloth rocking-chair, a more modern yellow oak rocker, an ancient secretary, and a couch unmistakably Sheraton. The floor is covered by a hideous carpet, tacked down snugly to the very baseboards. There are two crayon enlargements on the walls, and an oil painting of a wide willow tree which used to stand at the foot of the driveway by the road.

There are four bedrooms on the second floor of the big house. The west room, in front, was always occupied by the head of the family. Its high canopied bed with the turned posts of a mellow, golden tone has an air of state about it; the

bureaus are of mahogany rich as old leather; the chairs fit to delight an antiquary's eye. Hooked or braided rugs made by the Dillard women lend warmth to the floor. The east room in front is equally a thing of beauty; but the two smaller rooms in the rear are more modern in their furnishings.

This house, standing on the eastern border of the town of Fraternity, long ago became a local tradition. The reigning Dillard was inevitably the leading citizen; was usually the chairman of selectmen and went to the legislature if he chose. The house itself, the oldest house in town, is rich in background; it has depth, it wears a fine bouquet of age and long respectability and honest pride. So many generations of Dillards, able and honorable men, have dwelt therein that they have left their mark upon the place as it has left its mark on them. Fraternity folk speak of the house in proprietary tones, as though it were one of their possessions; it is indeed a part of the town's heritage, a peg on which to hang the local pride.

Such fine old homes inevitably mold and modify the lives of those who dwell in them. It has been so with this one. Fraternity used to say that you would know a Dillard anywhere.

## II

Ethan Dillard sat in his old painted rocking-chair with the padded cushion in the seat, beside the kitchen window that looked down across the road toward where Marshall's Meadows lay broad

and smiling in the sun. The fresh green of the new grass there was just pricking through the dead stubble of the year before, and Ethan's eyes rested on the meadows lovingly. The light from outside was reflected in a shining spot on his bald head; the strong lines of his heavy chin, curiously slackened of late years, were silhouetted against the window. His daughter Esther was washing the breakfast dishes in the pantry at his back; as she wiped them she came out into the kitchen to put them away in the cupboard near his chair. She was talking steadily, her voice flowing smoothly and without interruption. She was in her fortieth year, but her hair was glossy and dark as it had always been and her cheeks, though faintly lined, were red. Esther was the gentlest-mannered woman that ever ruled a household with a rod of iron. Once she stooped over her father to adjust his leg, which was outstretched before him and pillowed on another chair. A few days before, coming down through the pasture from Bartlett's Woods, he had tripped upon a juniper branch and fallen, his knee striking a stone. Young Dr. Crapo had forbidden his walking till the bruise should heal; for he was an old man, almost seventy, and even trivial mishaps were serious.

Esther was talking about her brother Leon. A letter had come from him the day before, post-marked Manila. He was coming home. "It's a mercy they didn't send him to Cuba!" she exclaimed, in a high, clear voice pitched to reach her father's failing ears. Esther's tones were usually so mild and low she seemed to whisper.

"He was always such a helpless man; the Spaniards would have killed him, I know. It's a blessing he's coming home. It will be a comfort to have another man to help Caleb; there's so much to do, and it costs so to hire help, and then they don't do any work." Her flowing words were punctuated by the clatter of the dishes; her voice was faintly muffled when she retreated into the pantry, came more clearly each time she emerged into the big kitchen. "I wish he was here now, to tell you all the things he's seen and everything, while you have to sit still all the time. I expect it's just driving you wild to have to sit there."

Her father said mildly: "It's kind of a rest, Esther. I've been tired."

"Well I declare it's no wonder," she assented. "The work that has to be done . . ." She went back into the pantry, still talking. A few minutes later, emerging with half a dozen plates in her hand, she looked toward her father and saw that his chin had settled on his chest. She thought he was asleep, and smiled in a bright way; then some intangible slackness in his posture alarmed her, and she spoke to him. When he did not answer, she crossed to his side; beneath her hand, his shoulder lay lax and unresponsive. Thus peacefully the man came to his end. "I've been tired," he murmured, and died. He was sixty-nine years old.

"He's been getting old for three or four years," Esther told Aunt Mary Howe, a few days later. "He began to get hard of hearing, before Leon enlisted and went away; and being deaf seemed to make him feel kind of helpless, and un-

certain. He had a little way of smiling. He'd worked so hard, all his life."

Aunt Mary, almost as old as Ethan himself had been, was a thin little woman with coal black hair, who dressed in black and spoke in a sparing fashion.

"Yes, he was one to work," she agreed.

"He liked doing," Esther explained. "He loved the place so."

Ethan had indeed loved his broad acres. His feet were set in the soil. His grandfather had built the great house, and he and his neighbors had cleared all the countryside; the lands went under cultivation, and the deer and the moose—with no adequate cover left to shelter them—withdraw northward where still the forests lay. Fraternity thrived and prospered in those days; seventy years ago there were sixteen hundred people in the town as against a scant six hundred today.

When this first Dillard died, his holdings were shared among his sons; the wide domain was divided. To Ethan's father came the home farm and the house; and he prospered and bought back land from his brothers to widen his own acreage. He married young and lustily; had three wives before he died. Husbands in those days were apt to outlive their wives, and usually—since women were needed on the farms—they remarried. The result was a complicated intermingling of blood strains; it was inevitable that the community, already isolated from the outer world, should become closely bred. Ethan, whose share of the estate of his father had included two hundred

acres of land and the house, married but once; his wife was a Howe, and there was a remote blood kinship between them. During the years of his strength he made some mark in his own part of the world; he served two terms in the legislature at Augusta; and at home he widened his boundaries till he owned some four hundred acres of land. The home farm was good for little but pasturage and hay; but the Bartlett Woods on the ridge above furnished lumber and fire-wood; and the Howe farm and the Mason place had soil which better repaid cultivation. Marshall's Meadows, across the road, he had bought with hired money, assuming a debt which held him for years in bondage. When that was paid, he bought the Pond lot, good for little except the white birch and cedar which grew there. A vigorous man in his prime, but for a dozen years his energies had failed; now he was dead in his chair, where he had loved to sit and look out across those meadow lands which he had acquired with so much toil and which he always loved. There was, year by year, a stout crop of hay upon these meadows; they were steaming now in the warm spring sun, and stirring everywhere with the swelling and bursting forth of new growth. That he must leave them behind him must have been his great grief when he died, had that end not come so suddenly as to leave him no time for grieving.

But he left grief behind him. Esther had loved him with a proud affection. Dora, her younger sister, a stout woman of thirty-five, wept for him in her room and her eyes were red and raw for days. Caleb, the brother, a stooping, doubtful

man, sat beside his father's body with a puzzled grimace upon his twitching countenance. Caleb was thirty years old, but he seemed older; he had never seemed young. Life wearied him; he did as he was bid. Leon, gone to the wars these two years past, had found pleasure in the soil; he was a farmer born. But Caleb lacked the robust gusto, the impassible patience and the indomitable fortitude demanded of a husbandman in this northern land. It was arduous toil for him, and nothing more.

The funeral was an occasion. The town attended, and scores of Ethan's relatives came from miles away. Aunt Mary Howe, his wife's sister, at Esther's invitation stayed on. There was a spiritual kinship between these two women, for Mary Howe was a spinster, and Esther would never marry. Fraternity folk said she had never had a chance, but Esther herself was unmoved by their tongues. "Any woman can marry," she used to say. "But she's a fool if she does." And sometimes she added, with something like a shudder: "I don't see how they ever endure the thought of it."

She had been the actual head of the family for a number of years; her father had submitted to her gentle tyranny, kept his thoughts to himself and accepted what comfort could be got out of life. His wife had borne him seven children, of whom only these four survived; there had been years when he watched for the coming of love into their lives, when he expected the girls to marry, when he joked with his sons because they brought home no brides. But in the end he had accepted

disappointment, had decided that Esther would never marry, nor Caleb. Of Dora and Arthur Tuck he was not so sure; and Leon, he sometimes thought, might find himself a wife. Such a consummation would have pleased the old man; but now he was dead and past all earthly pleasing.

Aunt Mary and Esther, in the days after the funeral, fell into the habit of making the beds together in the morning. They had so many things to talk about; their words were punctuated by the flapping of shaken sheets, the thump of fist on pillow. One day they had been speaking of Ethan's purchase of Marshall's Meadows, and Esther remarked:

"We have over four hundred acres of land, now."

"I remember how proud Ethan was when he bought the Meadows. Even before they was paid for," Aunt Mary commented.

"I think he'd have given the rest of the farm for them," Esther agreed. "He used to say they'd be a fine heritage for us."

"I don't expect he left much else," Aunt Mary commented, with an edge of curiosity in her tones. "Ethan wasn't one to put by."

"Oh, we'll have plenty," Esther assured her, noncommittally. She added a moment later: "Even if there wasn't anything but the farm, with Leon and Caleb to do things, we'd be all right."

"Leon may have other notions when he comes home," the older woman reminded her. "He's been away a spell. I expect he's changed."

Esther smiled and said confidently: "Leon

won't ever change. He always liked farming. Caleb doesn't take to it. I've heard father say that if Caleb planted a hill of beans, frost was sure to kill them, or something."

"Your father never gave Caleb credit," Aunt Mary reminded her with soft severity. They were finishing the last bed. "When does Leon get home? I'm going to stay till he comes. I'd like to see him."

"Soon," Esther replied. "I don't exactly know. His letter just said he was coming, sometime this month." She readjusted the last pillow. "There, that's done. I've got pies in the oven. Let's go down stairs."

Twenty-four hours after the funeral, they had settled into routine once more. Caleb worked all day, preparing for the planting that must be done as soon as the ground was fit to work. In the evening, grouped about a single lamp set on the table in the big kitchen, the three women talked and talked while he slept softly in his chair. They spoke more and more of Leon. They expected they would be mighty glad to see him.

On the eighth day after his father died, he came. He had been gone two years; they had accustomed themselves to his absence, and his return was like the advent of a stranger.

### III

Leon Dillard had been from boyhood used to accept the dominance of his sister Esther; the family all recognized that within that soft voiced woman dwelt an iron will, and they yielded

to it as the easier course. Yet it would be hard to say how Esther enforced her authority. She never scolded; she never argued; she never seemed to insist. But on the other hand, her opinions were always firm and formed and unchangeable; she never changed her mind; she knew exactly what she wanted done, and did not hesitate to express her wishes. She had decision; perhaps this fact was in itself sufficient to give her the position of leader in the household. It was she who said when a meadow needed re-seeding; it was she who formed the policy of the farm and chose the land that should be planted and announced what should be planted in that land. Old Ethan's failing powers leaned upon her; Caleb and Dora were willing to be led and ruled; Leon had found her already well established in authority before he put his 'teens behind him, and it had not occurred to him to rebel.

But Leon had been two years gone and the world had worked upon him. He had taken orders; but also he had learned to give them. He had rubbed shoulders with men in whose brains were germinating colossal plans, immense constructive ideas; he had had a minor part in the organization of anarchy into government, of barbarism into thrifty husbandry. And he had seen ships, and great cities, and wide horizons across which rippled, as far as the eye could reach, the ripening, golden wheat. He had seen an automobile! They saw, at once, a change in him.

It was true that physically he had altered but little. He had been a lean, loose-jointed young man with a hawk-face and a long jaw; he still wore

these features. But his shoulders were a little more broad, they held themselves more squarely; and deep in the shadows of his eyes—his eyes were blue—there lay a quality not easily identified. His speech, which had been slow and unready, was as slow and unready as it had always been; his smile had the same quality of wistful apology; but the set of his head and the depths of his eyes each spoke in its way of the beginnings of a change.

By the time he had been a week at home, they began to accept the fact that he would not talk about the things he had seen. Their questions he answered briefly or not at all. Yes, he had seen some fighting; no battles, but a skirmish or two. Yes, he had seen dead men. Seen men killed? Well, probably. Was it true that the American troops butchered Filipino women and little children? He knew nothing about it. Were the soldiers abused by their officers? He had not been abused. Sometimes, groping for an answer, he would protest: "You can't understand, anyhow. This here is all you know."

Only one phase of his experiences had made sufficient impression to render him vocal. He told them about the vast farming country of the Middle West, as he had glimpsed it from the windows of his train. On Sunday, when Arthur Tuck had come to dinner, Leon's enthusiasm carried him into a flood of speech. "Far as you could see," he cried. "And mile after mile. Farms, fields, all full of wheat and corn and things growing; and fat cattle, and hogs. I only been gone from here two years, but it seems like I can see

where folks have quit trying around here. The Huntoon place is shut up."

"Dave's gone to Waterville to work in a mill," Arthur Tuck explained.

Leon nodded, little regarding this explanation. "And the Jeffers house, the windows all boarded up and the yard full of weeds," he went on. "And the Jardine farm all growing up to birch and alders. There's three since I've been gone, and just in two years."

"Will Jeffers' wife died," Esther told him softly. "She'd bore him seven children, poor woman. He's gone to live with his oldest girl in Augusta. And that Jardine girl ran away with a fellow that works in the pants factory in East Harbor."

"I walked up on the hill back of the woods yesterday," Leon pursued. "Why I can remember when I was a boy you could see cleared land all down the valley from there. Now there ain't twenty tons of hay cut along there anywhere. It's just a pa'tridge cover. This land here will grow anything you'll plant, too. It don't need half the working, once you get the stones out. That high land up on the Howe farm will grow strawberries, and canteloupes, or anything. I was up there yesterday."

"You can't hire help," Caleb explained, defensively. "It's more than a man can do to tend the chores around the barn."

Leon nodded. "You never was much to farm, anyhow, Caleb. But you can take care of things around here, and I'll farm the Howe place this year. That orchard up there can be made to bear;

and I'll grow some stuff that will surprise folks around here. We can ship it to Boston, easy enough."

Esther said in her slow, positive tones: "Your father thought it best to just cut the hay on the Howe farm, Leon. I feel sure he knew the wisest thing to do."

"Father was old," Leon argued. And Dora looked at him and at Esther with startled eyes. No one ever argued with Esther; Dora vaguely expected some sensational result from this retort of Leon's. Esther must have been surprised; must have felt his words as an assault upon her position; but if she did, she made no sign. Only replied:

"Yes, he was old; and the years do bring wisdom, Leon. You're the youngest of us all."

The reproof was mild enough, yet Leon felt the sting of it, and his tone was vaguely apologetic as he replied. "That's so," he assented. "But I've seen what they are doing, other places; and I think we can do something around here. We've got to do something. Taxes going up all the time; and we don't want to sell off any land."

"We mustn't ever sell any land," Esther agreed.

"I'll help Caleb here, of course," Leon went on. "But I'd like to do some planting up there, too. It won't do any harm."

"There's more than you both can do around the place here," Esther reminded him. "It's kind of swamped Caleb."

The discussion was continued in the evenings, day by day. Leon thought they might, with so

much waste land, breed cattle for the market, if only on a small scale. "We've always vealed our bull calves," he reminded Caleb. "But we can patch up the fences a bit and let them run for a year or two and make money on them." He proposed buying a good bull; but Esther vetoed this suggestion with a single word, so positively that even Leon did not repeat the proposal to her. He did urge it on Caleb. "The stock we've got is run down," he argued. "There isn't any good blood in the county. I milked four cows last night and got less than ten quarts of milk."

"We don't feed them any; they just pasture," Caleb explained.

"Then let's feed them," Leon urged. But Caleb shook his head.

"Esther doesn't like that sort of thing," he replied. "She never did."

"Esther's all right," Leon said thoughtfully. "But she'd never make a farmer's wife."

Leon's plan to put in a garden in the rich high land on the Howe farm was mentioned only once or twice more in their evening discussions; the thing never came to an open issue. But Esther never forbade the venture; and when the work about the home place was in hand, Leon one morning loaded the plow on the cart and drove around by the road and up to the spot he had chosen. When he came home at noon for dinner, constraint sat heavy upon them all. Esther made no sign, seemed undisturbed; but Caleb and Dora ate in silence, watching the brother and sister as though expecting an outbreak. Leon did not force the matter. In the afternoon he returned to his task.

That evening he spoke enthusiastically of the richness of the land up there. "It won't need dressing," he told them. "I've been surprised to see just how good it was. I'm going to put in some beans and peas this year, and maybe some potatoes." He spoke at length, tried to draw from Caleb an opinion; but Caleb held a discreet silence, and Dora watched Esther expectantly. Esther said at last:

"I'm sure we don't mind you're trying it, Leon. But of course the work around home must be done."

"It's going to be done," Leon assured her.

Through the weeks of early summer, in the interval between planting and haying, he spent more and more time on the ridge. After the long toil of the hay-making was done, he returned once more to the tasks of his choice. But he was not so apt to talk to them now about what he was doing there, and Dora remarked his silence, and thought he was afraid of what Esther might say. One warm afternoon in July she walked up through the fields, planning to join him and come home with him at dusk. But she came home alone, and her cheeks were pale when she stumbled into the house. Esther saw her and asked at once:

"Dora? Whatever is the matter with you?"

Dora said miserably: "Why, Esther?"

"You're pale. What is it? What happened?"

Dora wished to hold her tongue; but she was afraid of Esther. "Leon . . ." she stammered.

"What is Leon doing?" Esther asked. The older sister was quite calm, perceiving that some-

thing was amiss, preparing herself to cope with any emergency.

"He was over by the stone wall, talking to Jennie Weir," said Dora, in tones of stark dismay.

And even Esther was faintly appalled at that; Dora saw that for a moment her color fled. But Esther could never be shaken for long.

"I will speak to Leon," she replied. "You did right to tell me, Dora."

"They were talking across the wall," Dora ventured, as though this might palliate the crime.

"Leon has forgotten himself," Esther commented, and said again: "I will speak to him."

#### IV

Fergus Weir had been a granite cutter on Fox Islands, for a dozen years of his life; five or six years before this time, he had found himself seized by that affliction of the lungs to which men of his craft are subject. The man himself was of a wiry and resisting breed; his wife had a wholesome gusto about her. They decided that he should buy a farm; and the hills about Fraternity were full of farms for sale. So they had come into the community, and Fraternity received them with a mild friendliness. There is no shame intrinsic in the task of shaping granite; Fergus felt no inferiority in the community, nor was he made to feel any. Accustomed to industry and with thrift in his bone, he whipped the straggly farm into shape, patched up the buildings, grubbed out the birch shoots which were swarming across his pas-

ture lands, re-seeded a meadow or two, painted his house. Not all at once. The process was a slow one. During the long winter when there was so little else he could do, he repaired the buildings where he might be sheltered from the cold. When these tasks failed, he cut and manufactured and stacked cordwood, some for his own use and some for market. In the spring when the earth was soft with frost, he wallowed in the icy muck, grubbing out his fields. His planting was done quickly and carefully; his hay was never spoiled by rains that caught him unawares. By the time Leon came back from the war, the Weir farm was in good order, as well tended as any in the town.

Fergus himself was in large measure responsible for this result; but his wife and their daughter had each contributed to the end. Mrs. Weir was a woman who revelled in sheer labor. Fergus, foraying with his wild mates from the quarries, had encountered her at a dance in Bath, in the days of his youth. Chance so directed affairs that he fought on her behalf; the man he fought was taller by a head, but Fergus laid him low with a chair, and the girl admired his prowess. They were married next morning. For a year or two thereafter, he had occasion to fight for her more than once again; for she was one of those women in whom men sense the slumbering of slow fires, at which they seek to warm themselves. Her loyalty to Fergus brought him many a buffet; but he had a ruthless ferocity which made up for his lack of stature, and men began to leave him alone. Their baby was born, and Mrs. Weir made Fergus hire a house, in which later on she took

boarders, and became as thrifty as he. Now she loved to come into her kitchen in the morning and find the pans all scoured; she revelled in the soapy, hot water and the rattle of dishes; she found a clean, physical satisfaction in the hiss of hot milk upon the bottom of a tin pail; and she loved the warm smell of baking bread. Her floors were like the decks of a ship, her counterpanes as white as snow.

This baby of theirs was grown to be Jennie Weir. Leon had seen her before he went to war; but she had left only a faint imprint on his memory. At that time she was a stocky girl of fifteen or sixteen with a pigtail of moist brown hair and dark eyes, and freckles across her nose and cheekbones. She must have come with her father sometimes to the Dillard farm; and Leon was able now to conjure up a vague memory which pictured her sitting on the high seat of the cart, a lumpish sort of girl. He had thought no more of her, and their first encounter after his homecoming was in the nature of a discovery, on his part if not on hers. She must have thought about him; for his return was part of the gossip of the town.

He was working that day on the southward slope of the Howe farm, cultivating potatoes which he had planted there. The end of each row brought him to the crumbling stone wall which marked the boundary between the farms. During the forenoon he saw that a girl was driving a horse which drew a rude drag harrow across the plowed land adjoining. The course of this horse was to and fro, parallel with the wall; each turn brought the girl nearer where Leon was working.

It was strange to him to see a woman in the fields, and he wondered about it; remembered that Fergus Weir had bought this adjoining farm, remembered that Fergus had a daughter, remembered the lumpish child upon the cart. By and by the end of a row brought him to the wall as the horse and its drag approached; the girl stood upon the drag, her body swaying to the inequalities of the ground, the reins held in both her hands. For the first time he looked at her more intently, and perceived that the lumpishness was gone. This girl was not slim; yet she stood so easily, with her fine shoulders well back, that she seemed slender. Only closer scrutiny revealed the satisfying substance of her. The little summer winds, eddying around her feet, stirred her skirts a little and he saw that she was barefooted. The shapeless calico dress she wore borrowed beauty from the form it covered. A sunbonnet was low across her brow and about her cheeks. He waited to see her more closely; and when the horse came to where he stood he spoke to her.

"A hot day!"

"Eh, yes, it's warm," she answered, rolling her r's in a pleasant, throaty fashion. Her voice was even and slow.

"You must be Jennie Weir," he told her.

"And who else would I be?"

"You don't know me, I expect."

"I used to know you," she replied.

"I'd not have remembered you," he confessed.

"You've growed a lot in two years gone."

"Have I then?" The horse had come to a stop as though without command. She pushed back

the sunbonnet and wiped her forehead with her arm; and he saw the sweat glisten on her arm. Her feet, spotted with rich earth, were whiter for their stains; he thought how wise she was not to hide them in old and broken shoes. The brown hair was damp across her brow.

"You had freckles, then," he told her, remembering.

She turned her eyes upon him appraisingly; then drew the bonnet about her face once more. "Eh, but it's warm for sure," she said again, and clucked to the horse, and went upon her way. And this was all the first meeting of Leon and Jennie Weir.

But not the last. Leon found that the girl stayed in his thoughts. He had meant to tell Esther and the others, when he got home, that he had seen her; had meant to remark that she was grown, and that she had attained a certain comeliness. It was only when he realized that he had not related the incident to Esther that he perceived how much it had affected him. He was astonished at the change in the girl, his memory of the stocky child she had been was so vivid, his more recent recollection of the finely formed woman she had become was so keen. There was a pulse of warm blood in Leon; it had not been wholly bred away. He turned to the Howe farm again next day, though there was no pressing need, in the unadmitted hope that he would see her.

He saw her not that day, nor for a week thereafter. Then he made occasion to go to the farmhouse for a word with Fergus, and thus spoke

with her again. A few days after that they encountered each other, as it were by chance, along the boundary wall. He found that the skin of her cheeks and throat was clear and rich as milk, and her eyes astonishingly warm and brown; and there was an odor that lurked about her. He thought its seat must be in her heavy hair. It was rich, and comforting, and reassuring; yet there was at times a faintly sharper fragrance, hard to define. Once, when he leaned toward her, he thought she smelled sweetly of new milk and fresh young onions and clean-turned sod.

She was already one of those women who walks serene in beauty; a beauty that appealed not so much to the eye as to the inner senses. Leon found it in her voice, which disquieted him; he found it in her fragrance, which disturbed him; he found it in her eyes, which met his so equably. He thought there was about her something bovine; she was like a heifer! There were hours when he wondered whether her breath would prove to be as sweet as that of the placid cattle ruminating in the tie-up at home. There was something satisfying in merely looking at her; she had not so much a positive beauty as a lack of uglinesses which are so apt to mar humanity. He tried to tell himself she was too big; she was as tall as he, and may have been heavier. But this condemnation carried no conviction even to his own mind.

He began to be afraid of her; distrustful of that in himself which she awakened. But he could not keep away from her. Their encounters, whether products of chance or tacitly planned, became more frequent.

So one day Dora saw them, talking together by the wall.

## v

Dora Dillard and Arthur Tuck had been—what word shall be used?—had been friends for a little more than five years. Their relation was as bloodless as it is possible for any relations between man and woman to be. It was understood that when he came to the farm he came to see Dora; even Esther recognized this, and accepted it. “I expect Arthur will be out to see you tomorrow,” she would say. But it was never openly acknowledged between the sisters that there was any purpose, or could be any purpose, behind these visitings of his. It is almost literally true to say that Arthur and Dora had had no moment alone together in the five years gone. More than once Arthur had sought, in an ineffectual fashion, to maneuver such a thing; but Esther, smooth as iron, prevented without seeming to prevent.

She was able to do this by reason of the superior mental vigor which had always given her ascendancy over Dora. Dora would have assured you that she thought as Esther thought. Her opinions in the matter of Arthur and of the thing he threatened, were in three strata. If you asked her whether she considered marriage indelicate, she would have denied it quite evenly. At the same time she would have acknowledged to herself some such belief; while underneath these two opinions there would have been still a third, seldom admitted even to herself. There can never be any question that Dora fundamentally loved Arthur Tuck, and wished to marry him.

She wore the opinions of her sister like a garment; they not only covered her, they entered into her flesh and stiffened her and guided her footsteps. Thought of revolt had never come to her; it had never seemed conceivable to her that anyone could go against Esther. When Leon proceeded to farm the Howe place in spite of Esther's gentle objections, Dora trembled for days, expecting she knew not what catastrophe to follow. When now she discovered Leon and Jennie Weir talking together in such pleasant wise, beside the stone wall which divided their lands, she was torn between wonder at Leon's daring, and consternation at what he had done. She told Esther—it never occurred to her that she might connive with Leon and keep his secret—and waited in quivering anticipation to see what would happen.

Esther had said she would speak to Leon; but she was in no hurry to do so. That wise woman had not achieved her dominion over the minds of her family by rash and unconsidered speech. So now she waited her time, and Dora waited, and Caleb—vaguely perceiving that some current ran beneath the smooth surface of their lives—likewise watched and waited. After a day or two, Leon, whose conscience was already burdened with doubts, understood that Esther knew. His consternation was almost as acute as Dora's had been. Still no word was said; but Esther knew that Leon had perceived her displeasure. She waited, let him torment himself, wished to force him to speak first.

In this first small skirmish she was defeated,

not by Leon's will but by his cowardice. Misunderstanding her tactics, he began to hope that after all he had been mistaken. Began to hope that Esther knew nothing; began to think his imagination was responsible for his fears. Toward the end of the week he had in some measure recovered his confidence. There was, after all, no harm done; he had happened to talk once or twice to the girl. That was all. Of course, if Esther knew, she would reproach him; but if she knew she would have spoken. So he held his tongue, and Esther was forced to speak.

She chose Sunday afternoon. The day was hot. The dinner dishes had been cleared away, the stock watered, the house put to rights. Someone might drop in, so there was a plate of cookies on the kitchen table, covered with a red patterned napkin; and lemons and sugar were set out ready for the hurried manufacture of lemonade. In front of the house toward the eastern end there was shade from a gigantic elm; the two brothers took chairs out to this cool spot. Sitting here, the brothers and sisters could watch the occasional team go by. Caleb sat with his hands idle in his lap, wearing his Sunday clothes with an ease which always differentiated the Dillards from the other men of Fraternity. Leon was smoking a pipe; a thing not permitted indoors. Dora had an embroidery hoop in her lap, her plump fingers busy with the fine needle. Esther, small and calm in her black dress, sat with her hands folded across her waist and rocked with precise little movements, thrusting her chair back with the tips of her toes which rested on the sod.

She spoke first to Caleb. "Have you been up to see how Leon's farming is coming on?" she asked.

Caleb looked at her, and then at Leon. "Why, I went that way one day last week."

"Are the things doing well, Leon?" Esther inquired, in her mild, whispering voice.

Leon nodded his head. "Yes. Yes. The potatoes look good, and the corn, and the cucumbers."

"I noticed you were up there a good deal," Esther assented. "You oughtn't to leave too much of the work here to Caleb. He has just all he can do."

"He does more here than I do," Caleb confessed; but Esther gently shook her head.

"You were always one to take Leon's part," she told him. Thus Leon perceived that he was upon the defensive. He moved uneasily in his chair, and with some ostentation knocked out his pipe and refilled it.

There was a little silence, and then Esther spoke of other things. "I was thinking the other day that father tried to farm the Howe place once, but he decided he had all he could do here around home," she remarked. "We used to do a lot of farming when I was a girl. Before you can remember, Leon."

"Oh, I can remember," he replied.

"You could get help then," she continued. "There were more people in town, and they were always glad to come and work for your father. It pleased them to work for a Dillard. It's always been so, since your great grandfather built

this house; people have been proud of the place. It was the first house in town, you know."

"There's an old account book up in the attic," Dora remarked. "I read it one day. With the record of the building, and what everything cost. In pounds and shillings. The ink all yellow."

"I take a lot of satisfaction out of such things," Esther said mildly. "Grandfather kept a diary, too, for years. You ought to read it, Leon. It's good for a man to know what his family has been, when they're a family to be proud of."

"Yes, that's so," Leon agreed.

"We don't often talk about these things," Esther commented. "But it's a good thing to remember them."

She rocked placidly in her chair, and Leon became more uncomfortable. "It's kind of warm," he said uncertainly, and wiped a sudden flowering of perspiration from his brow.

"I hadn't noticed it," Esther told him unpromisingly.

"Why, it seems warm to me," he insisted. "Don't you feel kind of hot, Caleb?"

Caleb looked at Esther. "There's a good breeze," he compromised.

A long silence fell upon them then; and in this silence Leon suffered. After all, he reminded himself, he ought not to worry Esther. He knew she had the interests of the family at heart; the family had always been dear to her. That was Esther's strength; it was always so obviously of others that she thought. He was already on her side, against himself, before she spoke again. When she did speak, the attack was more direct.

"You remember Fergus Weir bought that farm beyond the Howe place," she reminded him, in a tone half questioning.

"Yes, I remember," Leon confessed.

"He's done very well for himself," Esther commented. "I always like to see a man better himself, don't you?" Her tone was kind, but it put Fergus Weir so definitely in his place.

"It looks in good shape over there," Leon agreed.

"I haven't seen it for a year," Esther said. "I never go that way." She addressed her sister. "Do you ever walk up that way, Dora?" Dora, caught unawares, could not speak. Esther turned back to Leon. "Dora likes to walk around the farm in the summer," she explained. "You remember, she was always one to walk."

He understood that Dora must have seen him with Jennie, and he was sorry for her; she sat now so miserably busy with her embroidery. He knew how shocked she must have been at her discovery.

"Our father always was one to be neighborly," Esther remarked. "He did so many things to help Mr. Weir get a start there. The man was so helpless. Just a day laborer, before he came here. They say his wife works very hard."

Leon knew he should say something, but found nothing to say. Esther murmured: "I must go over and see if there isn't something I can do to help her. People ought to be friendly to newcomers in town, I always say."

"They've been here five years," Leon reminded her.

She smiled. "We've been here a hundred, Leon," she remarked. The words were innocent enough; yet they accented the contrast. He felt crushed and humiliated and apologetic; and she pushed her advantage. "They've a daughter, I think. Wasn't there a fat little girl who used to drive her father's cart to town sometimes, Caleb?"

Caleb hesitated. "I guess maybe."

"I think I've seen her," Esther decided, confirming her own recollections. "Yes, I'm almost sure there is a daughter. I expect he makes her work in the fields. Poor man. He has to, to get along."

Leon said abruptly: "She's grown up now." He had spoken without thought; and Esther seized her advantage.

"Oh, when did you ever see her?"

"Why, she was driving a drag harrow in the next field one day," he replied reluctantly.

Esther nodded. "I was sure it would be so. Poor child. I'm always sorry for people in their position." She rocked serenely. "It's a wonder they haven't more children. People like that usually litter like pigs." The rough phrase came from Esther's smooth tongue with an astonishing force.

"Fergus had stonecutter's consumption," Caleb said unexpectedly; and Esther nodded.

"Yes, there's always disease in such families. Probably that why they haven't but one child. Well, I suppose she'll run away with some farm boy and have a flock of babies around her all her life. They go so."

Leon ventured: "I don't think she will," as though Jennie had been charged with sin. Esther asked:

"Oh, do you know her?"

"I've seen her around," he replied.

"But of course you don't know her," Esther went on, as though he had not spoken. "Forgive me, Leon, for saying such a thing. I knew better. It's all right to be neighborly, and do what a body can for poor folks like that; but that's a different thing. That's one thing, the Dillards always married well, their own kind." She appealed to Caleb. "Isn't that so?"

"Yes, that's so," Caleb agreed.

"And they weren't ever the sort to fandangle with farm girls in the fields," Esther added serenely. "It's a wonderful thing to have a family behind you to take pride in."

Leon told himself miserably that all she said was true. He had been beguiled by the warm ardor of the sun across the sweet fields, by the fragrance of summer and the rich crumbling earth where seeds were germinating. He gave thanks no harm was done; no more than a word, a smile, a brief minute spent together now and then. She had moist brown hair that smelled sweetly, and a skin like milk, and eyes like brown pools upon whose surface golden flecks danced as the frost-painted oak leaves dappled the dead waters of the river in the fall. But she was just Jennie Weir, Fergus Weir's daughter. She seemed to draw him toward her by a mighty force; yet he still shrank back from all her sweet attractions. The thin Dillard blood, bred fine by

pride, and austere by habit, and remote and cold by lifelong training held him in bonds. It was as though they fought together, Jennie Weir and he; himself the booty for which they thus contended. Yet Jennie had done no more than look at him, speak with him, let him come near her for a little while. One day, when he was with her, he had been swept by the sudden thought that there were men he had known, in these two years of his exile, who would have kissed her before now; the thought appalled him, he shrank from it. He did not wish to kiss Jennie Weir.

Yet her lips were warm and tender.

The afternoon was drawing to its close. Two young people passed, in a high buggy with the top up. He knew them. Young Dave Wattles, from the village, with Mary Hunt. As they passed the house they giggled together, and kept their eyes upon the road.

"They've been keeping company a year," said Dora.

Esther nodded. "Children, rushing into things," she commented in her low voice. "It makes me sick to think about it, sometimes."

It was not merely her spinster habit which prompted her words; it was the Dillard blood in her, bred thin and cold. And the Dillard blood flowed in Leon, too. It made him sick, sometimes, to think of kissing Jennie Weir.

Yet the thought persisted in returning to him.

## VI

Esther told Dora she would speak to Leon. The manner of that speaking was characteristic. Leon had, after much inner perturbation, decided of his own accord to avoid Jennie Weir. When he went up to the new land he was working, he made sure, before showing himself, that she was not in the adjoining fields. Once or twice he took Caleb with him, counting on his brother's passive presence to protect him. But while he took these measures to banish the girl from his life, he was not so careful to banish her from his thoughts. He knew this must be done, admitted the necessity; but his small memories of her were intoxicatingly sweet; and he had not the courage to put them by. When he helped Caleb milk the cows in the tie-up, the warm odors which the creatures shed reminded him of Jennie; when he worked the fragrant earth in the garden, he seemed to see the print of her bare feet in the soft loam; when the warm afternoon sun upon the flanks of the barn evoked from the fresh hay stored there an aroma like heady wine, he thought of her. She had appealed not so much to his sense of sight as to his nostrils; he knew that she was beautiful; but her very presence was so richly fragrant. The scenes in which he had encountered her became a part of her in his memory: the fresh-turned earth, the newly mown hay sweating in the sun, the crisp moss upon a boulder in the wall, the acrid odor of wild cherries on the tree beneath which they had met. She was associated with all the fruitful earth; he felt in her the stirring of

the reproductive forces which were active all about them. He became more and more abstracted and absorbed in these memories of his; but when Esther asked if he were ill, he denied the accusation nervously, and wished to skulk away. A sense of his own guilt in that he had spoken to Jennie at all was heavy upon him; he felt himself faintly degraded. Yet had never so much as touched her smooth, white hand. Spite of his hard toil by day, he no longer slept soundly of nights. She intruded upon his dreams.

When Leon came home, his father's death had just left vacant the great front bedroom. So, almost by chance, he came to occupy the place that had always been held by the head of the household. In this room, in this high-canopied bed with its slender turned posts, Leon lay sleepless, night on night; and the pale light that came in through the small windows filled the room with dim shadows, and when he closed his eyes and opened them abruptly he thought at times a woman moved there. Tall and full-formed and robust and sweet and strong. He would not always force himself to drive this vision away. His nerves drew taut, his countenance faintly haggard. Esther was concerned for him. He was himself tormented by a longing which seemed to him a base and shameful thing.

So one day he encountered Jennie Weir again.

The Howe farm lay, roughly speaking, along a low and rounded ridge. The north slope of this ridge was marshy pasture land broken by great boulders; the southern slope had been cleared of rocks many years before, and included

two meadows and a smaller field which Leon had put under cultivation. Toward the east end, the ridge fell away a little into a run; a trickle of water wound along the bottom of this run. Alders grew here, and cedars, and a hemlock or two. The run was on the fringe of the Bartlett Woods. Near the boundary line between the Howe place and Fergus Weir's farm there was a spring which Leon knew.

This spring rose in the shadow of a great boulder upon which a hackmatack tree had reared its lacy height. A group of small hemlocks shaded it. The water welled up through a bed of pin gravel; and there was a little pool as big as a barrel, lined with flat rocks on which cool moss grew thickly. The overflow trickled through a crevice between two of the rocks and down the run. At one side there was a bank, carpeted with the needles of an old pine which was so malformed that it had escaped the axe and saw of the lumbermen who passed this way forty years before. About the spring itself ferns grew luxuriantly. The place was always shaded, always damp and cool upon the hottest day.

Leon came here one afternoon early in September. He had seen no sign of any one on the Weir place when he crossed the ridge; had worked for an hour or so; then became conscious that he was thirsty. The spring lay beyond the meadow, a quarter mile away; he turned in that direction, and followed a little path through the low growth to where it was hidden beside the run. Jennie was there. He came upon her suddenly, pushing back the low branches of the hemlock as he

brushed through them, and at first he did not see, she lay so still.

She had brought an armful of sweet fern from the pasture by the wall and had spread it upon the carpet of needles under the old pine to serve as her pillow and had gone to sleep there. The sun, in its slow swing across the sky, had reached a position from which its rays struck down upon her body, below the outflung branches of the pine. Her head was still in shadow, pillowed on her arm. She lay on her side, facing the spring; her garments draped her; the sun had warmed her. Leon, coming upon her thus unawares, stood very still.

But his step had wakened her; her eyes, slowly opening, saw him standing there; and she raised herself on her arm and arranged her skirts and looked at him with sleepily smiling eyes and said:

“Oh, I was asleep!”

Leon said nothing. He wished to back away, to retreat. The trees hemmed them in together, shut out all the world; the little runlet from the spring chuckled at their feet. He would have run, but could not command his feet.

She sat up and threw the braid of her hair over her shoulder. Her sunbonnet had been under her head, upon the sweet fern which served her as pillow, and she picked it up and put it on and tied the strings under her chin. “Pa and Ma went to East Harbor this morning,” she explained. “I got through the work by noon, and came up here. I like to come here. It’s kind of pretty.” Leon was so still. “In the spring, there’s flowers along the run,” she added. He

made no sound. "You look scared," she told him gently. "Did I scare you?"

"I didn't look to find you here," he confessed. "I came for a drink."

"The water's always so cold."

"It never goes dry," he assented. But still he made no move. She got uneasily to her feet.

"I better be going back to the house," she suggested.

His heart leaped with relief and yet he trembled with fear. "I don't want to drive you away."

"I ought to be getting back. It must be late."

"It ain't after four."

"Pa and Ma'll be getting home."

He could think of no more to say. She stepped down beside the spring, and said smilingly: "I'm thirsty," and knelt on a flat rock below the little pool, pushing back her sunbonnet, to dip her lips in the cool water. When she raised her head, her cheeks and the tip of her nose were bedewed with cool drops; she wiped them away with her hand, laughing up at him. "It got in my nose," she cried; then asked: "You mind drinking after me?"

He shook his head and knelt soberly beside her and drank. The cool water ran through his veins like wine. She had moved back a little to make room for him, and her hand rested on one of the moss-covered rocks that walled the spring. He could see it from the corner of his eye as he drank. Leon had hardly been so near her as this before. He was almost afraid to raise his head.

When he did so, she was sitting quietly, watching him. He stood up for a minute; then he too

sat down, the little trickle from the spring between them. She took off her sunbonnet and fanned herself with it. "I got warm, in the sun," she explained.

"It's always cool in here," he replied.

She said nothing more, idly fanning herself; but she showed no disposition to go, and Leon was immensely relieved at this. It was not so fearful to have her here. He might himself have gone, but his other concerns seemed of little moment now.

She spoke of the work he had done on the Howe farm. "Pa's always said the land was good there," she explained. "He wanted to rent it, last year; but I guess he was kind of afraid to ask. He said it was a shame it should lie idle so."

"There's a lot of good land idle around here," Leon agreed.

She said soberly. "Yes. It's too bad. The folks here don't seem to like farming very much, I guess."

"They're moving away, a lot of them."

"I like it. I like to get out and work in the fields myself," she explained. "I like to feel the dirt on my feet, and see things grow, and smell the hay. Pa lets me help him a lot. Ma don't need me in the house; there ain't much to do there."

"I like it, too," Leon agreed. "I always 'd like farming. Caleb, my brother, don't like it. It's hard for him. But I do. And things seem to grow for me."

"Things will grow for you if you like them well

enough," she said thoughtfully. "They're like animals, kind of. A cow'll give more milk to a person that likes it; and I think it's the same way with a piece of ground."

Leon looked at her in faint bewilderment. His own imagination was not an active one; farming was to him a prosaic and commonplace affair; he had always found a profound satisfaction in the tasks which it involved; but it had never occurred to him to look behind the every-day processes of cultivation. "I never thought of it that way," he said.

She had shifted her position, sitting a little sidewise, resting her weight on one arm. With her free hand she dug at the moist earth beside her, and lifted a fragment of it, and crumpled it between her fingers. Then saw him watching her, and laughed, and brushed her hands together. "I haven't seen you, the last few days," she said.

"I've been busy around home."

She looked at him with thoughtful eyes. "I expect there's more than you two can do, with all your land."

"There's a good deal to do, but we don't farm much of it."

"Your sisters don't work outside, do they?" she asked curiously. "They haven't even got a flower garden. I should think they'd like to make one."

He shook his head. "No." Something made him get to his feet and then sit down again. She asked:

"You have to go back, don't you?"

"Not yet," he told her hurriedly.

She stirred. "I ought to go; but it's so nice here."

Leon's heart was pounding so that he had to be careful to form his words correctly; his voice was uncertain; he could not trust himself. He got up again and looked at the spot where he had been sitting. "It's wet here. The ground's full of water," he remarked.

She moved a little to one side. "Sit over here. It's nice and dry."

He hesitated, then obeyed her. The fact that she was now so near him paralyzed his muscles; he rested his elbows on his knees and clasped his hands to stop their trembling. Jennie looked at him for a moment, looked away and seemed to wait, looked at him again with a curious eye. At last she said gently:

"Are you worried about something?"

He shook his head, surprised. "No."

"You look kind of tired, since the last time I saw you." There was a soft solicitude, an anxiety almost maternal in her tones.

"Well, I am a little tired."

"Why?"

"I haven't been sleeping very well," he said awkwardly.

"I don't see how a person could help sleeping, working all the time."

His eyes met hers. "I didn't think you'd notice," he said, hardly knowing what he said, amazed at his own words.

"Why, I couldn't help it," she replied simply. "Women notice things like that." She smiled. "I'm kind of worried about you."

"I'm all right," he protested.

"Men always say they're all right," she told him wisely. "Pa's that way. Ma has to take care of him like she would a boy. I expect your sisters take care of you."

He was surprised to discover that he had shaken his head, denying this. Hastily explained: "Oh, they do, of course." He could not think accurately, could only feel her overpowering nearness. The scent of her hair was in his nostrils; his eyes were filled with her; when she spoke, the rich, throaty tones of her voice thrummed at some taut and resonant part of him which vibrated responsively. She was looking away from him, down the run, her face half averted. A shaft of sunlight struck through the branches above them into the cool dampness of the hollow by the spring, and he saw little beads like dew upon her short upper lip. Her lips were faintly parted; they were so warm.

"That is, they mean to," he muttered, finding the silence unbearable. And her eyes turned to his again and she asked softly:

"What? What did you say?"

"I mean Esther and Dora do the best they know how."

"A man needs it," she assented. "Needs a woman to take care of him."

She must have known all that he felt; now seemed at her own words to take affright. "I have to go," she said, and got to her knees to rise. The movement turned her toward him; her skirts caught under her knees and hampered her. He scrambled to his feet and she looked up at

him with eyes in which faint panic struggled; and Leon saw this and read it aright and was abruptly very sure of himself. Nevertheless, it was an awkward job he made of their first kiss. His lips brushed her nose and she made a low, inarticulate sound, and seemed to crouch. He fell to his knees before her, and took her cheeks between his hands and kissed her on the mouth. Through her parted lips her warm breath came, as though broken by a half-caught sob.

Then he was frightened, and his blood turned to water, and she seemed to understand; for as they still knelt she drew his head upon her shoulder and held it there, her hand along his cheek, and she murmured:

"There, there! I saw, the minute I laid eyes on you, you needed someone."

He walked home stumbingly, his eyes on the clouds. But he wondered what he should say to Esther.

## VII

But as the event was, he said nothing at all to Esther about Jennie for some weeks. He went home that afternoon full of courage; but when he reached the house Caleb told him that Dora and Esther had driven to East Harbor, some eight miles away. Leon was at first minded to confide in Caleb, thought better of that. By the time Esther returned, his resolution had oozed away.

Such a surrender becomes increasingly difficult to revoke; days passed and Leon still was silent. He reached a compromise with himself; there was no hurry, the matter could wait. In the mean-

time, every day or two he saw Jennie; and each meeting was sweeter. At their first encounter after that day beside the spring, she offered her lips and he took them; he had lived in an atmosphere of restraint for so long that this in itself was an adventure. His sisters never kissed him, had not kissed him since he was a boy; his mother had been as still and remote as they. The lavish tenderness of Jennie seemed to him an outpouring of almost incredible riches; and he thrived upon it, so that he seemed to swell and broaden and tower. This was a period of growth for Leon; he was like a half-starved tree about whose roots rich stuffs are suddenly heaped. His blood ran faster and more ardently; his eyes cleared; his world took on a different aspect.

Their idyl was lived out of doors; they saw each other sometimes beside the spring, sometimes under the wild cherry tree by the wall, sometimes upon the crest of a little knoll back of Fergus Weir's small orchard. Jennie must have been happy in watching him grow and expand in the richness of the love she gave him; for Leon, he was completely absorbed in her and in himself, had not the capacity to stand back and consider either himself or the girl he loved from any more level-headed viewpoint. With her, he was completely happy; away from her and in the presence of Caleb and his sisters, he was increasingly ill at ease. But the widening of his life's horizon steadily continued.

He had been so absorbed in feeling, to the exclusion of thought, that it had not yet occurred to him to wonder what Fergus Weir's attitude

toward him would be. He knew Fergus; saw him now and then at the store in Fraternity village, or at a distance on the upland farm. But he had not spoken to Fergus of Jennie, had never mentioned the girl's name to her father. Till one day Jennie said to him: "Pa wants to talk to you, Leon?"

Leon was immediately contrite and ashamed; he told her so. "I'd ought to have gone to see him."

"I told him about us," she assured smilingly. "But he wants you should come to the house some day."

Leon went home with her that day; they walked across the sunny meadow together hand in hand, and came upon Fergus where he was busy on the great floor of the barn, building a pen to house his chickens during the winter that was now not so far away. The little man heard their footsteps behind him and stopped his sawing and looked over his shoulder; and when he recognized Leon, silhouetted in the wide door against the light outside, he dropped his tools and turned to meet him. Said cordially:

"Good day to you, Dillard. I've been wishful you'd come over and pass the time of day with me by and by."

Leon said straightforwardly. "I should have come before, sir."

"Eh, Jennie's told me all about you," old Fergus chuckled; and Leon saw that Jennie had disappeared and left them together. Fergus led the way out of doors. "We can smoke a pipe

out here without firing the barn," he commented. "Sit down, there."

A pile of old lumber lay against an apple tree by the barn door, and Leon sat down upon it, and Fergus seated himself a little apart, whittling at his plug. Leon said quickly: "You know about Jennie and me?"

"She's told me some, and her mother more," Fergus assented.

"I'm pleased to see you're not angry about it."

Fergus smiled. "Now Dillard," he replied, "there's no false shame in me. I know who you are and who your family have been. Your blood has run a bit thin, and you're going down hill; but just the same I'm pleased to think of my Jennie marrying a Dillard, and make no bones about it either. That great farm yonder needs working; you and your brother do but little that should be done. But Jennie'll be a help to you. She was made for a good farmer herself. She's an able young woman, Dillard."

"Yes, she is," Leon assented.

"I've been wondering what your people think about it all, though," Fergus remarked.

Leon hesitated. "I haven't talked with them," he confessed.

"You'll have trouble," Fergus prophesied. "I'm a level-headed little man, and I've no foolish notions. They won't take kindly to it; they'll say you are ruining yourself. If I thought they was right, I'd say 'No' to you and Jennie; for I've no wish to see her tied to a man she's ruined. But I think you've stomach and backbone in you;

and she has more than her share of both. I recommend you to stick to her, Dillard."

"I aim to do that," Leon assured him.

"I'd advise your going to your family and getting it over with," Fergus continued. "That's none of my affair; but all the same I believe in marrying while the blood is hot. I married so, and got a black eye for my pains now and then; but it was worth it, Mr Dillard, and you'll find it so. Have you made any plans for the marrying, now?"

Leon was red and uncomfortable; he said honestly: "I guess you know I haven't, Mr. Weir. I've been too—too wrapped up in Jennie. I never knew any other girl. And marrying—talk of marrying—doesn't come easy to me. But I want to marry Jennie."

"Y're a man," said Fergus succinctly. "Marry her, then. You'll find she's willing."

They talked for an hour; the first of many talks they had; for Leon, willing though he might be, was not to be brought too easily to the point. Old Fergus, at first impatient, saw at last that this was not reluctance on his part, but plain fright. He said one day, smiling wisely: "Eh, you're timid as a girl at the thought of it, Dillard. But I can tell you, marrying is nothing to be so feared of. I've been married past twenty year, and I like it better right along."

Leon got encouragement from Jennie's father; he got other things, of equal value. Fergus was a hard-headed, shrewd little man; he understood, without in the least exaggerating, the possibilities of a farm in these hills; and he was able to season

Leon's undue optimism with the salt of common sense. "Times are changed, these years," he pointed out. "A man can't hire help now, the way he could. So he wants no more than he can handle himself, on a pinch. That's one trouble with you Dillards. You've too much. It all pays taxes; but it doesn't all pay you. Some of your hay rotted on the ground last year; you've more woods than you need; you waste a pile of it. I've only a bit here; and I can manage it handy. That's the way to 'do.'"

He said, one day, that he could manage more if he had it. "Times I've thought of renting or buying the Howe place," he explained. "I doubt that you'd sell; but it would fit in nice with mine, and I could make it pay me. If you're ever wanting to sell or rent, I'd be obliged for a word on the matter."

Leon spent more and more time at the Weir farm. He liked Jennie's mother, and he liked Fergus. Little by little his courage was stiffened to the point where he might come to an issue with Esther. By the hours he spent with Jennie, his strength increased. Day by day, he was becoming a man.

### VIII

The young man was during these weeks in the late summer so engrossed in his own happiness that he befooled himself into thinking Caleb and his sisters had not perceived anything was amiss. He might have known they were not blind; that he wore his new-found happiness like a garland.

Esther, shrewdly watchful, may have been the first to guess that he was still seeing Jennie, that these two were drawing closer and closer to one another. Certainly, she began to manifest a quiet hostility toward Leon, which they all perceived. There were days when she treated him with such hard courtesy as she might have shown a stranger; she avoided being alone with him, and when they were alone sat stony and unwinking or moved about the tasks that engaged her without meeting his eyes. When toward the end of the summer he began to suggest plans for the coming year, began to propose an expansion of their farming activities, she met him with an iron opposition. Dora and Caleb were as always passive; they yielded to Esther's stronger will, but they did not fight at her side. Nevertheless, Esther's resistance Leon found astonishingly stout; she invoked tradition to repel him, reminded him that after all the Dillards were not grubbers in the soil. "When we could hire the work done, we farmed the land, of course; but your father and your grandfather and your great-grandfather were gentlemen, Leon. They were not used to break their backs with work. You owe it to them to remember that."

"We no more than scrape along, now," Leon argued. "If they were here, they'd take hold and do things, I say."

"It's better to scrape along and keep our heads high than to go working like animals, too tired at night to do more than slump into our beds."

Leon had a baffled feeling that Esther did not mean more than a part of what she said; he knew

her industry; it was not like Esther to warn him against work. But she stood on this ground, placid as a wall, barring him from every new adventure in husbandry which he proposed. It was a long time before he guessed that this opposition rose out of her knowledge that he had not abandoned Jennie.

Dora, more sensitive than her sister, probably guessed the truth almost as soon as Esther did. But the knowledge that in Esther awoke antagonism, aroused in Dora only sympathy. It is true this feeling was mixed with fear; she dreaded what Esther would do, was appalled at Leon's temerity. But there was romance in Dora; she herself had felt its stirrings; and no matter what her feelings toward Arthur Tuck might be, she was bound to respect and envy the courage which led Leon to follow his own road in despite of Esther's will. When Esther was not about, she paid her brother homage in many little ways. She watched over him, tended him, mended his garments, cooked things he particularly liked, anticipated his wants. Once she kissed him good night before going upstairs; and once or twice, in a faint fashion, she invited the confidences he might have given her, speaking timidly of his work on the Howe place, audibly wondering whether he ever saw Fergus Weir. She made Leon uneasy; he had no thought of telling her the truth. Dora had betrayed him before; and while he did not blame her for that, neither would he trust her to keep a secret now.

As matters chanced, it was with Caleb that he first discussed his feeling for Jennie. The two

brothers went one evening to the store in the village, and stayed for a while, taking some small part in the talk that went on about them. The Dillardes were always set a little apart by Fraternity folk; no one ventured toward them any familiarity. Thus though half the men in the store knew or guessed what was common gossip among the women folks, no one mentioned Jennie to Leon. But as they were leaving, Fergus Weir alighted from his buggy outside. Leon met his eye, and spoke to him cordially; Fergus responded with a smile and a hearty word. Then the two brothers drove away.

Caleb was not a curious man; it was seldom that he ventured a question. But the apparent understanding between Leon and Fergus led him to say: "You and him seem pretty well acquainted."

Leon nodded. "Yes, I've talked with him some. He's an able man."

"I guess he is."

Leon had a sudden burst of confidence in his brother; he was in an audacious mood that evening. "Look here, Caleb," he exclaimed. "I guess you know what I think of Jennie. You know, I want to marry her."

Caleb heard him with bowed head; they jolted along in silence for a little while, the older brother making no reply. At last Leon asked defensively:

"There's no reason why I shouldn't, is there?"

Caleb answered mildly: "I never thought of marrying, myself. I suppose if a man wants to, that's different."

"A man ought to, if he sees the right woman," Leon argued.

"Prob'ly so."

"And I'm going to," Leon insisted stubbornly.

There was another interval, broken only by the thud of the hoofs of the horse and the rattle of their wheels over a board bridge. Caleb said at last, mildly: "You know, Esther won't want it to happen."

"Why not?"

The older man smiled, with that faint humor sometimes apparent in him. "Better ask her yourself," he suggested. And Leon said he aimed to. A little later they pulled into the barnyard, and indoors found Esther and Dora sewing beside the lamp. But Leon did not push the issue then.

A few days later, however, he did confide in Dora. He knew she might betray him, but was willing that affairs should thus come to an issue. He met in Dora, however, and somewhat to his surprise, a more sympathetic response. Leon did not understand Dora, did not perceive the wistfulness becoming more and more her habit, which was the fruit of her denied longing for Arthur Tuck. Nor had he ever perceived that there was a fire in her, a spark of resolution which might lead even Dora some day to a defiant outbreak. When Leon told her, she wept; and when he asked her why she wept, Dora said:

"I guess I'm glad, Leon; glad and afraid, too. Afraid of what Esther will say. But then, you don't have to mind what Esther says."

"You know I do mind what Esther says," he

reminded her. "I want Jennie to be happy with us."

"With us?" Dora echoed.

"I'd bring her home here," he explained, in some surprise. "This is the place for her. And this is my home, all I've got."

Dora wiped her eyes. "I'd welcome her, Leon," she said gently. "I'd be good to her."

"Nobody could help being good to her," he agreed.

"It must be sweet to feel so toward a person," Dora said thoughtfully. She looked at him with some curiosity. "I've seen a change in you, Leon. She's done you good. Already."

"She's good to me," Leon agreed. He was suddenly humble. "Why just the way she touches me with her hand, or lets her cheek come against mine makes me feel better, feel like planning big things . . ." Dora nodded dumbly, tears upon her cheeks. After a while he added: "I want we should be married this fall. I've got to see what Esther will say about it." She assented. They were like children conspiring to confront a stern parental authority with a confession of their sins; Dora felt herself a participant in his guilt. "You might say something to her," he suggested.

But Dora shook her head at this, vaguely perceiving that if he boldly approached his sister, he would have the dignity of his own valor to support him. "No, it's for you to do that," she advised. They discussed ways and means, planned little stratagems which might lead to the opening of the subject, discarded them all.

In the end, he waited till an evening when they were together, when he had Dora's tacit sympathy and Caleb's neutrality to bolster him, and told Esther what he wished to do. She had been mending one of his socks; when he spoke to her, she met his eyes; when he blurted out the truth, she rolled up the sock and laid it on the table at her side as though she were done with him and his affairs forever.

It would not be accurate to say that these two fought a battle; it was rather a series of skirmishes, continued from day to day. Esther, beaten out of one stronghold, entrenched herself in another; he forced her back, kept her on the defensive. But she would never yield.

She said at first he was too young to think of marrying. Her attitude was one of faintly scornful condescension. "You're the youngest of us all, Leon," she reminded him. "I've never wanted to marry, nor Caleb. You're just a boy, and you've seen this pretty farm girl and lost your head. You'll forget her in a month, Leon."

He was furiously indignant at this; and this indignation served him well. Anger was a tonic he needed. He told her hotly: "I'm old enough to work, to do things. Nobody ever called me a boy when I was in the army. You're just foolish, Esther, to talk so."

"Foolish?" she echoed in her low, gentle tones. "I did not think you'd talk so to me, Leon. I've tried to do my share, these years, in advising the sensible thing to do. Haven't we always got along?"

"I don't care for that," he told her stubbornly. "You're foolish to talk so now. If being too young is all, then we'll be marrying right away."

So she was beaten in that first encounter; but in the next few days she managed to remind him, directly and indirectly, that Jennie was not the right sort for him to marry. "You don't want ever to forget who you are, Leon," she urged one evening after supper, while Dora and Caleb sat with averted eyes. "Your great-grandfather was the first man to settle here; and your grandfather and your father were big men in the town. There've been Dillards here in this house over a hundred years, and will be for a hundred more, if you're a wise man. Caleb will never marry; so it's you the name must go through, Leon. You want a wife that will be kind to be proud of."

"I'll be proud of Jennie," he answered steadily.

"You think so, now, because, she's young, and pretty, and she has flattered you. Have you talked to Fergus Weir?"

"Yes."

"And doesn't he know his girl and a Dillard can't make a match."

Leon smiled grimly. "He says she's too good for us, but he thinks she can make something out of me," he replied; and Esther, who was ever soft-voiced and gentle, flamed into a single angry ejaculation before she fell into a silence that lasted the evening through. Leon saw an appreciative smile in Caleb's eyes.

Arthur Tuck came out one Sunday, and Esther

appealed to him. Arthur was a man in his early forties, tall and spare, with scanty sandy hair insufficiently cloaking his growing baldness, and a drooping mustache, irregular in outline and forever becoming entangled with his food. He listened judicially. "I have not had the pleasure of meeting Miss Weir," he said at last. He was always deliberate and precise in his speech. "But I should suppose, Leon, that you would give Esther's opinions consideration."

Leon, understanding Arthur's willingness to conciliate Esther, smiled a little; but he said: "Come over with me to their house, now. We'll walk across the ridge. I'd like you to see her."

Arthur evaded that invitation very dexterously; but it silenced him.

Dora did go with Leon one day to see Jennie; they met by the wall, these three, and talked together for half an hour. On the homeward way, Leon appealed for an opinion; and Dora said fearfully: "I was afraid of her, Leon. She's so big, and strong; she just looks as though she liked working in the fields."

"She does like it," Leon replied.

"I don't think I could ever feel I knew her," Dora murmured. "But I'd be nice as I knew how, Leon. For your sake, anyway."

Through these intermediate stages, Leon and Esther came at last to frank and final opposition. They no longer maintained even the pretense of a harmonious and judicial frame of mind. Esther in the end stood flatly on the ground that Leon must serve the Dillard pride, must marry a fit

wife. "It's painful for me to speak so plainly," she confessed. "But you must have a wife who will give you children worthy of the name you give them, Leon. The subject is unpleasant; but if a boy will think about marriage, he must expect to face these matters."

"I've thought about them," Leon replied stiffly.

"Of course, if Caleb were married, or if you were never going to have children, that would be another thing. But she's the sort that will."

"Children?" Leon exploded. "Of course, we'll have children. I want to have children."

"And tell them, when they're grown up, that their father was a Dillard, but their mother was a Weir."

"For God's sake, what's the matter with Fergus Weir?"

"He's a day laborer," said Esther plainly.

They descended into a wrangle; Esther passed at last—and this was an unheard of thing—to tears. At sight of them, Dora turned pale and felt herself like jelly in her chair. Her muscles were water; she had a vague feeling that Leon's case was hopeless now, since he had brought Esther to weep. Esther never had resorted to this feminine weapon heretofore; it was quite evident that her tears were not intended to fight for her now. She wept with anger and with grief at Leon's contumacy, and she wailed:

"O Leon, Leon, if your father had lived, this wouldn't have happened."

"If father had lived, he'd have welcomed her

home here," Leon insisted. He had gone too far to retreat, forged stubbornly ahead.

"Here?" Esther's grief was almost pitiful; her defiance was tragic. "You shall not speak of bringing her here. Into your father's house; into your mother's very bedroom?"

"Where else?" Leon countered.

Esther threw up her hands in a hysterical gesture. "You're crazy, Leon. Crazy over the girl. I wash my hands of you. But she'll never come into this house while I live in it and I warn you of that. Never as long as I live."

"I'll bring her home the day we marry," Leon replied, in flat contradiction.

"Then I'll walk out of the door and sleep beside the road," said Esther. She rose, weeping bitterly, and fled from the room; and Dora, with one appalled glance at Leon, hurried to follow and comfort her.

When the sisters were gone, Caleb looked at Leon, and Leon looked at his brother. And after a while Caleb asked: "Well, I guess there's nothing you can do, is there?"

Leon shook his head. "I don't know what to do," he confessed.

But two days later—and silence had held them all in the meantime—he did it. He drove to the village and met Fergus and his daughter there. He had asked Caleb to go with him; but Caleb shook his head. "I've got to go on living with Esther," he reminded Leon.

So Leon drove alone, and met the girl he loved; and after a time they came home together

and drove into the Dillard yard. And Leon alighted and helped Jennie to the ground.

Esther was brave; she came and stood in the open door. Leon said gravely:

“Esther, this is my wife. I’ve brought her home. We were married in the village an hour ago.”

## PART II



## PART II

IN Fraternity, one day is very much like another; years jumble themselves together so that it is difficult to distinguish between them. Men do not date time by the almanac; they remember the year the river froze over below the dam, or the year there was so much snow, or the summer they had a killing frost in August, or the fall Evered was killed by his bull, or the spring Jim Saladine got the big trout. Days and months and years are significant for what they bring, not because of the names or numerals affixed to them two thousand years ago. It is easy for men here to lose account of the passage of time; one year is so like another. The great snows accumulate; drifts form; winds blow and the stark cold grips the land; then by slow degrees the bitterness of the cold is modified, the snow shrinks, drifts lose their imposing proportions, and one morning a warm rain dissolves the last of them. The frost-churned earth becomes a pudding of wet clay and honey pots; that passes and the plow turns an old furrow over again. Almost before winter is gone it is time to begin cutting the hay, and upon the heels of that the woodcock are whistling up from the coverts where gunners harry them. So come the snows again. Such years are cut to a pattern. There is little to distinguish them. One man's wife dies, his children go to Waterville, or Augusta, he sells his farm, or abandons it, and moves away. Another dies and his sons forsake the soil. A weary dweller in cities

buys a bit of land for more than it is worth and winces under the grim jests with which frost and wind and drouth harass the neophyte. Now and then two young folks marry; now and then an old man dies; now and then a baby is born. For the rest, the village store is always the same, whoever its proprietor; the mill below the bridge is filled with the same drone of saws day by day; the price of food is always too high and the price of pork or beef too low; the same old dry spell hurts the hay crop year by year. You must look closely to discover the small changes in the men who gather evening by evening at the store. Caps or hats hide the fact that their hair is dwindling; the brown the sun has lent their skin disguises all the finger prints of time. Abruptly you discover that this man is old; that this youth is become a man.

The life of the village is woven across a web of tradition. All that has happened in the town is remembered, and repeated, over and over again. If you were to sit silent and attentive behind the stove in the store for a sufficient interval, you would have the history of the place at your fingers' end. You would know the names that have persisted from father to son, and why this line died out, and when these newcomers first appeared. Some tales that have by their drama moved the imagination or by their humor tickled the fancy of the auditors you would hear told and retold to the point of weariment. This rich store of legend furnishes a background to the life of the people of the town; each individual is identified by what his father was, or by what he him-

self has done, or by some distinguishing trait which has attracted more than usual remark. There are no secrets; there can be no secrets where life is thus compacted. Each man's business is also his neighbor's, and was, and will be. Such a community has depth but little variety; it is rich yet it is also monotonous; and one day is much the same as another, year after year.

Habit is strong upon the town and upon the people in it. In each home you find the master of the house arising day by day at his accustomed hour, to his accustomed tasks; the women cook, wash dishes, clean, sew, and start the round again. There is little visiting among these women by day; in the evening the men see one another for a little while, then return to read for an hour beside the warm and singing lamp before sleep bears them away to bed. The daily papers and the farm journals come by the evening mail; sometimes there is a mail order catalogue. These are the things they read, nodding themselves to sleep the while, seeking their beds at last to rest against another day like the one that has gone.

Minutes build themselves into days and weeks and years so silently that you do not suspect they are at work until some sudden revelation leads you to perceive the fact that half a score of years have gone.

# I

Aunt Mary Howe was a spinster; and it is the lot of spinsters to be lone bodies in their old age. She and Esther had always liked each other; and for a year past now, Aunt Mary had been living

in the big old Dillard house, occupying that small rear room which had been hers when she came to Ethan's funeral. She was past seventy; spoke as little as ever and as economically; her hair, stubbornly black a few years before, was become sprinkled with gray; but there was no apparent weakening of her iron body. She insisted on doing her share of the work that had to be done; and in the morning after breakfast, when Caleb was out of doors, and Dora was cleaning up the kitchen, she and Esther liked to make the beds together. Esther herself, nearly fifty and habitually dressed in a narrow black dress which nevertheless clothed her thin frame voluminously, was as calm and assured as she had ever been.

Caleb came home from the store one evening and found the three women grouped about the lamp on the table in the big kitchen, their chairs rocking in an irregular rhythm so that they were now out of beat, now moved together. He had always come home to find Dora and Esther sitting thus; he could not remember any other arrangement. Aunt Mary fitted into the group; she seemed a part of it. The strangeness of seeing her there had worn off within a fortnight of her first coming.

Before coming into the house he had unhitched the horse and made the creature comfortable for the night, had pulled down a little more hay for the cows; at the kitchen door he wiped his feet painstakingly, for Esther hated having the smell of barn in the house. When he came into the kitchen, his hat in his hand, the three women looked up in mild welcome, and Esther asked:

"Is it raining, Caleb?"

He shook his head. "Stars are all out. It's come off clear."

"We need a spell of dry weather," his sister commented. "Is there anything in the paper?" Caleb shook his head. He had a letter for Dora, and gave it to her.

"I had one from Leon, too," he added.

Esther said nothing; she never mentioned Leon's name, and seemed not to hear, if they spoke of her brother while she was about. But Aunt Mary, not in the least intimidated by Esther, asked whether Leon's folks were well; and Caleb replied:

"The new baby was a girl."

Esther permitted herself no sniff of displeasure, but her countenance was eloquent. Aunt Mary protested: "I didn't know they were expecting another."

"Yes, yes. We told you," Dora reminded her.

"My memory ain't failing me yet," Aunt Mary retorted. She was sometimes inclined to be irascible.

"Weighed eight pounds," Caleb announced. "And Jennie's all right, and so's the baby."

Dora asked: "What are they going to name it?" And Caleb replied:

"Leon didn't say."

"I never can remember whether that's four or five," Aunt Mary protested, as though they were to blame.

"Five," Dora told her. "Mary and Sam and Fergus and Caleb. Don't you remember they named the first one after you?"

"After me, indeed! Jennie's mother's name was Mary."

Dora smiled. "Well, both of you, then. And Sam is named after Uncle Sam Howe. You know how Leon always liked him to come to the house, when he was a boy."

Esther rocked unemotionally in her chair; she seemed to endure their conversation without entering into it. Aunt Mary commented: "Leon was a nice boy. I always liked him."

"He's got some fine children," Caleb ventured slowly. "Mary's as pretty already as her mother. And she's a help around the house, and she's only nine years old."

Esther spoke to her sister. "Who was your letter from, Dora?"

Dora had forgotten to open it; she did so, now, and said: "Oh, from Sadie Morrison," as she began to read. A moment later, "Oh!" she exclaimed. "Isn't that the funniest thing? Sadie's going to have another baby, too."

"Another!" Esther commented in her habitual low tones. Aunt Mary asked sharply:

"Who's Sadie Morrison?"

"She lived in East Harbor, don't you remember? We were in the Academy together; and we've always been friends. She married Joe Hall."

"Dan Hall's boy, in East Harbor?"

"Yes. He has a good position in Bath, now. This is their second. They were married the year after Leon was."

Esther spoke gently. "I'm surprised at Sadie. I always thought she was such a lady."

Aunt Mary seemed to understand this somewhat cryptic comment. "Well, when a person gets married, you have to expect such things," she remarked. Esther nodded, and Dora looked from one of them to the other and held her tongue.

After a few minutes of silence, Caleb said: "Esther, Eben Hobbs spoke to me about the Pond lot again tonight. He said he might come up a little on his price."

Esther looked at her brother keenly; then lowered her eyes again. "I hate to think of selling," she confessed; and the confession seemed curiously like a weakness in that strong woman.

"I know," he agreed. "But the cord wood's all cut off of it. It's not worth anything to us."

"We'll wait," Esther decided. "We'll wait and see."

Caleb nodded. The decision in such family matters always lay with Esther; this was well understood among them. Caleb, as the only man in the house, was the titular head of the family; but Esther was, as she had always been, the power behind him, dictating all he did. She gave at length the signal for retiring, rising, and bundling her sewing together and turning down the lamp preparatory to blowing it out. On the mantel shelf above the sheathed-in fire-place behind the stove, four smaller lamps with polished chimneys were ranged in a row; and Caleb lighted them, one after the other. Each took one of these, to light the way to bed. Esther now occupied the room that had been her father's; Dora had their old room to herself. The sisters and Aunt Mary went up the front stairs together, and Aunt Mary went

through Esther's room and the back hall to her own small quarters.

Caleb stayed below for a little while; when they were gone, he took Leon's letter from his pocket and read it again. There had never been any complete break between these brothers, and Caleb had spent a day or two at Leon's farm at the time of his godchild's christening. Leon wrote:

The baby was born last night and is as healthy as a calf. Jennie didn't have any trouble. She was a little disappointed it was a girl. She wanted to name it after me; but I'm just as well pleased.

Jennie'll be up and around soon, I guess; and it's lucky. We're going to have a lot of work on hand this spring. The sheep take time and a lot of care; and Jennie's good with them. I've got the orchard to go over, too; and I expect we'll seed the big meadow this spring. But maybe we'll let that go till after the hay's cut. Two of my cows came in last week; and we'll be making a lot of butter as soon as Jennie's on her feet.

We wintered well up here. The snow was pretty deep, and it looked for a while if we got a warm rain there'd be high water, but it went off a little at a time, so there's no harm done. I've got to cut out a lot of alders in the pasture along the brook this year. It'll be a help when Sam's old enough to do something. I've got one man hired to stay with me, and he says he'll stay right along; and he can turn off quite a bit of work when he gets started. But he's slow to start.

I got a new team this year. Paid for them with the steers I beefed last fall.

Jennie sends her love to you all. If you can get away, you ought to come up and see us. Young Caleb is old enough to know you now.

Old Caleb—he was in his fortieth year, but he

had always been old—finished the letter, reading slowly and as though he were reluctant to be done. He folded it and put it in his pocket; then took his lamp and started up the back stairs to bed. The top of his head was growing bald; this spot caught the reflected light and tossed it back again. He was silhouetted for a moment in the stair well, a wistful, faintly stooping figure, before he shut the door.

## II

It was ten years since Leon's marriage; since that afternoon when he brought Jennie home from the village and found Esther waiting to confront them at the door. She met his announcement with stony eyes, seemed for a moment inclined to hold her position and bar them out; then with a sudden, bitter gesture came out into the yard and passed them and with head erect stalked down the drive toward the highway. "I will go out and sleep beside the road," she had threatened; and Leon saw now that she would do as she had threatened. He had expected her, in the end, to yield; this defiance angered him. He took his wife's arm and led her into the house and into the little-used parlor; and Jennie moved beside him, calm and unafraid.

But after all, it was Leon who left the house and Esther who held the battlefield. Caleb assumed for a little while the role of director of destinies. He summoned Leon, left Dora with Jennie, and the two brothers went down to where Esther sat upon a boulder by the roadside. It was late afternoon, the sun was at a long slant

across the meadows below them. This was the last time Esther and Leon would meet face to face for twenty years.

Their talk was brief. Caleb pointed out that Esther had no other home; there was no one to whom she could go. Leon, fundamentally reasonable, admitted this. Caleb suggested that Leon take the Howe place as his share of their father's estate. "You can maybe fix up the old house there," he reminded Leon. "And you can stay with Fergus Weir while you're about it."

Leon considered. There were eighty-six acres in the Howe place, out of about three hundred acres of tillable land in all the Dillard holdings. Besides this land that could be cultivated, old Ethan had left the Pond lot and the Bartlett Woods, about a hundred acres in all. Leon said reluctantly: "I'll need money while I'm getting things started. I'm entitled to something for my share of the wood lots. I hate to bother, but I've got a family to look out for now."

They reached an agreement. Caleb said he would have Arthur Tuck arrange the deeds and the settlement at once. "You'll go to Weir's?" he asked.

"Since my own blood turns me out, yes," said Leon coldly.

Esther uttered her first word. "You have withdrawn yourself from us. Him that touches pitch is defiled. You're no Dillard any longer."

Her heat cooled him; he smiled a little. "Some day you'll change that, Esther," he told her. "Some day you'll be sorry for today."

"I shall never see you again, or speak your

name," she retorted, in her slow, still tones; and their repression made the words more terrible. But still Leon smiled in that faintly appealing fashion; he only said:

"I know you're honest, Esther; but you're hard, and stubborn, too. I've no regrets for myself, but all for you."

Caleb said: "Come back to the house, Esther, and speak to Leon's wife." But Esther shook her head.

"I stay here till the house is clear of her," she replied. And at that Leon's eyes did harden, and the two brothers went up toward the house without further word. Outside the door, they struck hands.

"I'll see you," Caleb said awkwardly, and Leon nodded.

So Jennie and Leon went away, walking up through the pasture toward her father's home, and Dora wept as she watched them go. When they were a little ways off, they saw Esther come to the house, and heard the windows open. Leon knew the intent of that; and his slow anger deepened. But Jennie slipped her hand in his; and she said:

"No matter, Leon. You and I will get along."

So he forgot his anger and remembered only that Jennie was his bride.

The transfer of the Howe place to Leon's name was effected, but during that winter he became apparent to him that to live so near the ancient home of his family would be a constant source of friction. He frequently encountered Caleb at the store; once or twice he had speech with Dora on

the road; and twice, in his sleigh, he passed Esther riding with Caleb, and she dropped her eyes and hid her face from him. Toward spring, talking with Fergus Weir, he expressed the desire to get away, to go to some locality remote from this that had been his home. And Fergus, that wise and frugal little man, applauded his decision and made possible its fulfilment. He bought the Howe place, Leon's inheritance; paid nine hundred dollars in cash and gave a mortgage for two thousand dollars; and Leon was able to sell this mortgage to the bank in East Harbor. With the money Caleb had paid him for his share of the wood-lots, he had something over three thousand dollars. So in the late spring, when the roads were firm, he and Jennie took one of Fergus's horses, and a buggy, and went exploring. They lived like gypsies for a fortnight, and found two abandoned farms, side by side, on the southern slopes of a ridge in the country twenty miles north of Fraternity. One cost them little more than the back taxes; the other they bought almost as cheaply. They made haste to establish themselves, and Leon was able to do some farming that first year, and to cut a plentiful store of hay. He bought two cows and a horse from Fergus, and Fergus gave them twenty hens and a rooster or two. They chose the house that was in best repair; and by the end of the summer, when Jennie's first baby came, they were established and secure.

Caleb approved Leon's decision to move. "It's good farming country up there," he said. "You'll make a go of it. But I hate to see the Howe place go out of the family."

"I'd have sold it to you," Leon replied. "But you couldn't pay; and I had to have money, Caleb." His tone was apologetic.

Caleb nodded. "We might have mortgaged; but I hate the thought of it. There's so little coming in. I'm not made for a farmer, Leon."

"You'll get along," Leon encouraged him.

Caleb smiled wistfully. "It's too much of a load for me; but I'll do the best I can."

"Maybe I can help you, in a year or two."

"Esther wouldn't want that," Caleb commented simply.

So the Dillard place shrank by one-fourth its former acreage, and Leon and Jennie went pioneering, and Jennie bore a child, and the next year another. And under Leon's hands their land became fruitful and bore plentifully; and year by year their substance grew. The rotting old orchards took on new life; young trees were planted and thrived lustily. Leon widened his acreage of tilled land year by year. In his ample pasturage he ranged an increasing number of cattle; and instead of vealing his bull calves he fed them for two years, or three, before beefing them, and increased his profits thereby. He became a man of mark in the community he and Jennie had chosen for themselves. At three-year intervals two more babies came.

At home, on the old Dillard place, matters went not so well, but the Howe farm, under Fergus Weir's shrewd handling, took on new life. The hay seemed stouter, the tilled land more fruitful; and the old orchard was put in order, so that in a good year Fergus had apples to sell. Caleb,

wandering that way, sometimes met the man and had talk with him; he got news of Leon in this fashion, and Caleb had a yearning after his brother. But also he found Fergus worth knowing; they became in a measure friends. Fergus advised him, counseled him, might in the end have made a farmer out of him but for Esther's steady resistance to every innovation Caleb could propose.

The world all about them was changing, but Esther refused to change; so the Dillard place went on in the same way. They kept a few cows; and when there was milk enough, they had a pig or two. No chickens, because Esther said they littered the barnyard and were too noisy, even if penned behind the barn. They cut what hay grew of its own accord—and there was always good hay on the Marshall Meadows across the road. They picked a few apples in the fall. Each year a little more money went out than came in. Even by selling the bulk of the hay from the Meadows, they could not keep the balance even. They had to keep some hay for their cows; so they sold four cows, retaining only two, and were thus able to sell more hay.

Dora broke her leg, one winter, slipping on an icy step; and Esther found herself unable to handle all the work necessary to her meticulous housekeeping, so they hired a woman from the village to help her and to help care for Dora. The doctor's bills were small, but they added to the expense. That winter, too, the old mare which Esther liked to drive died, and they had to buy another. Caleb put a small mortgage on the

Mason farm, which lay to the west of the home place, along the road. This mortgage grew a little, year by year.

Six years after Leon's marriage, they began to sell cordwood off the Pond lot, which was all wooded land and fit for nothing else. In three years the cordwood was gone; and a steam mill man made Caleb an offer for the lumber left standing. Caleb consulted with Esther, and in the end they decided to accept. Now the stripped and ugly land, lying to the east, beyond the Marshall Meadows, accused them whenever they looked that way. Eben Hobbs owned the farm beyond and needed more pasturage; he had offered to buy the Pond lot more than once; but Caleb and Esther clung to it, unwilling to see their boundaries still further curtailed.

"We've never sold any land," Esther used to insist. "Father never did, nor grandfather, nor great-grandfather. Only when they died it had to be divided among so many children. But we children have kept together, and so been able to keep all Father got. We mustn't let it go."

She ignored Leon; this was her practise. It was as though she had no second brother.

"We'll have to do something, I guess, though," Caleb said, reluctantly. "We're behind on the mortgage money. I don't see where it's coming from, this year. The Pond lot would pay the interest and some of the principal. I hate to think of the Mason place being mortgaged that way. It makes me feel, when I go over there, like it wasn't ours any longer."

"I can't bear to sell," Esther insisted. "We mustn't think of it, Caleb."

So each time they put the temptation behind them.

A year or two before, Leon had written Caleb. He said they wished the new baby to bear Caleb's name, and invited his brother to come to the christening. Caleb had not fully comprehended until that visit the extent of Leon's progress. It was true the farmhouse was small, and, with so many children, crowded; but the shed was new and well arranged, and the barn was large and in good repair. "We're building a new wing on the house next year," Leon had explained. "Got to have more room."

The two brothers walked over Leon's land, through the orchard and the meadows and along the rows of sturdy-growing stuff in the garden. Caleb said little; but the contrast between this and the home farm affected him powerfully. Leon, watching him, thought Caleb had aged and was bowed with worry; and he asked once or twice whether all were well at home; whether he might lend his help in any form. Caleb shook his head. "We get along all right," he said soberly. "The same old way."

Caleb found a change in Leon; he told Dora so when he got home. "He's put on weight, of course," he explained. "But he looks better every way. I guess Jennie's been good for him, Dora."

Dora asked how she was; Caleb said she looked fine. "Not a day older," he declared; then amended that. "Yes, older, but in a good way."

She don't look like a girl any more; but she looks happy and well."

Dora nodded. "I expect it's sweet for her, having children," she commented wistfully; and Caleb looked at his sister almost shyly. He had thought for a year or two that Dora would be better off if she married Arthur Tuck. He thought there were times when she seemed ill; she was so quiet and so utterly subdued.

He had spoken to Esther once or twice of the possibility of Dora's marrying. Arthur had approached Caleb, seeking an ally; and Caleb was willing to help. But Esther put his advances aside with a gentle finality. "Dora don't want to marry," she declared. "She'd never be happy if she did."

Caleb was not so sure; but it was habitual with him to yield to Esther.

### III

The sale of the Pond lot, reluctant as they were, was inevitable. It eventually came about in this wise.

The interest on the mortgage on the Mason place was due in July. By the middle of May, it had become obvious to Caleb that they would be unable to pay it. He did not bring the matter to an issue with Esther; she knew as much as he about the family's resources, and it must be equally apparent to her. So he waited for her to consult with him if she chose to do so.

Caleb's visit to Leon had opened his eyes to the conditions in the community of which he was

a part; his talks with old Fergus had assisted in the process. He had been accustomed to take the life of the town for granted; to watch the slow abandonment of the farms as though this were a matter of course. He now began to see the parallel between this condition among his neighbors and the disintegration of his own estate; yet he saw no way to halt the crumbling of the domains which he and Esther administered. They had to live; and the price of their living was already an irreducible minimum. They were caught between the millstones of high prices for supplies and low prices for their products. There was no co-operation among the people of the village or the town; it had not occurred to them that by uniting they would acquire the power to drive a better bargain; or if it had occurred to them, the wisest heads had perceived the impossibility of any union among people habitually so centered each in his own life. Caleb gave much troubled thought to the situation; but he had not the energy to break the web which bound him. Each year it seemed to him less important to make a garden; each year he sold the hay from the Meadows across the road with fewer twinges of conscience. The disappearance of the last stick of lumber from the Pond lot was merely a fillip to an old wound, the scar of which had healed.

One night at the store he heard that Dave Morton was going to move to Rockland. Everyone knew the reasons back of the move. A dozen years before, Dave and his wife, with their two children, had gone to care for old Will Andrews, then paralyzed and nearing his end. Will had

a little farm; he left it to Dave as payment for the care he had.

The farm, under Dave's hands, did not quite support his family; but there was on its lower acres a considerable growth of hardwood, and Dave cut a few cords of this every year and sold it and thus managed to live. More children came year by year; the oldest boy went to Waterville to work in a mill. The condition of the family had steadily degenerated. Now the wood-lot was cut off, the margin that made the difference between a living and a deficit had been extinguished. So Dave was moving to Rockland. Himself and his wife, it was understood, would find work where they might; his oldest daughter would earn her board; the younger children might be able to continue in school for a year or two.

The whole thing depressed Caleb. When he got home that night, a cloud sat upon his brow. Caleb always had a worried look; but Esther remarked the fact that he had some new concern tonight, and asked him what it was. He said: "I heard at the store that Dave Morton's selling his farm."

Esther repeated the name inquiringly; he reminded her who Dave was, and told his circumstances. Esther nodded. "We're better rid of such folks," she said, with a gentle implacability. "They huddle like rats, breed like rabbits. It's only a question of time with all of them."

"The poor get poorer," Aunt Mary commented.

"Dave's worked hard," Caleb argued. "It's kind of a shame to see him lose his farm."

"I expect it's mortgaged for all it will bear."

"I hear so."

"I remember him as a young man," Esther said coldly. "He might have done well, but he married one of the Dane girls."

"She always kept the house nice," Dora ventured, almost pleadingly. "I was inside once, a year or two ago."

"Nice? With a litter of children under foot." Esther looked at her sister in scorn, turned back to Caleb. "Why should that worry you, anyway, Caleb. The affairs of such people."

Caleb hesitated, then said bravely: "I was thinking we're going the same road."

The three women looked at him in astonished consternation, and Esther's eyes were blazing. "Caleb!" she exclaimed.

"Well, we're selling off our woods, and mortgaging our land," he insisted.

Esther's anger had sharpened her usually gentle tones. "Caleb," she warned him, "I will not be mentioned in the same breath with Dave Morton. You must be crazy. Your father was representing the town in Augusta when Dave Morton's father was the town drunkard."

"I should think as much," Aunt Mary applauded.

"Well, Dave and I may be working side by side in a Rockland mill ten years from now, if things go on," Caleb persisted. His very daring—for Caleb was usually a mild and submissive man—won Esther's reluctant respect. She said:

"You're tired, Caleb. You better go to bed and rest yourself."

He shook his head. "I'm all right."

But in the end she bundled him off to bed; and

in the morning, though his fears persisted, his courage had fled. He did not reopen the subject.

A week or so later, wandering aimlessly over the Mason place, Caleb saw Fergus Weir with a team at work on the ridge above, where the Howe farm lay; and he turned that way. He and Fergus met not infrequently; and Caleb found a stimulus in the talk of the active old man. He spoke now of Dave Morton's catastrophe—he could think of it in no other terms—and Fergus nodded and said he had heard. "He made his mistake ten years ago," Fergus said. "When he started selling off more wood than the land would grow in a year. Cutting into his own foundation from the start, he was. As bad as planting year after year without any dressing. Aye, as bad as selling the land."

Esther had attributed the disaster to too many children; Fergus called it bad management; and Caleb's thoughts had run along the same line. To have Fergus confirm them was to increase the load of trouble that he bore. He did not pursue the subject, was glad when Fergus spoke of other matters.

Fergus was complaining that he could not hire men to help him. "They're busy with their own farming, or working on the road, or they want to go fishing," he explained irascibly. "I've talked to a dozen. I could handle the whole place myself, up to a year or two ago, but I'm getting old, Caleb. It needs another man now. There's land up here I could work, if I had another man."

He rambled on. Fergus was becoming increasingly voluble as he grew older; his own troubles

or imagined wrongs always made him talkative. "Had a man last year that wasn't good for much, but I paid him good money before he was through," he exclaimed.

The matter of the interest on the mortgage was never far from Caleb's mind; he asked now: "How much did you pay him?" And Fergus told what he had paid, talked on. Caleb's thoughts, confused and uncertain, clung to the only rock in all this rubble of talk; the fact that money might be earned by working for Fergus. Cash money, legal tender for the payment of interest. Abruptly he asked:

"What would you pay me?"

Fergus looked at him in frank astonishment, so that Caleb blushed to his ears, the painful blush of a man already growing old. Then Fergus swore an oath of delight. "By God," he cried, "I always said there was stomach in the Dillards yet. Leon's proved it; and I believe there's bowels in you, too." Caleb, to his own amazement, warmed to the little man's praise.

He knew he dared not tell Esther; so there was from the beginning something furtive about his arrangement with Fergus. He stole away from the home farm for half a day at a time, when he could; once or twice managed a whole day. Such interchange of services for hire was the usual thing in Fraternity, but the Dillards had been accustomed to hire instead of being hired. It was the first time in his life that Caleb had earned money directly by the work of his hands; he had an almost boyish pride in the first payment he received, and wished he might boast of it to his sisters,

and would have done so but for his fear of what Esther would say. He hoped to keep the fact from her for a while.

But it was never possible to deceive Esther very long; and at the end of ten days she burst upon Caleb one evening after supper, when they were all grouped about the lamp, with a flat question. "Were you working on Fergus Weir's upper field today?"

Caleb could never lie; he admitted his guilt. "Why?" she asked, deceptively mild; and Caleb blurted out the answer.

"Because he pays me for it," he confessed.

Esther did not speak, did not move; but Caleb was appalled by his own words and shrank in his chair; and Dora, watching them both, stifled the dismay which she felt. She knew how unspeakable this thing must be in Esther's eyes; Esther who had never forgiven Fergus for what his daughter had done; Esther, who never forgot she was a Dillard; Esther, whose pride was so stern—and so vulnerable. So Dora waited, watching Caleb, watching her sister. And Aunt Mary, as indignant as Esther nevertheless kept silence to see what Esther would say.

The issue astonished them; they saw an aspect of Esther's character which they had never suspected. For in the long silence that held them all, the anger slowly faded from Esther's countenance, was succeeded by doubt, then by an iron composure. And when she spoke at last it was in gentle, almost appealing tones.

"It's my fault, Caleb," she said. Caleb looked at her in surprise, unable to reply. She nodded,

as though to herself. "Yes, it's my fault," she repeated. And after a longer interval: "What will Eben Hobbs pay for the Pond lot?" she asked.

So it came to pass that another corner was cut off the Dillard lands. Eben Hobbs bought the Pond lot and paid cash on the nail; they applied the money to the interest and principal of the mortgage on the Mason place, keeping only a small cash reserve. Arthur Tuck had a hand in preparing the necessary papers; and after Eben had driven away, Arthur tried to say something cheerful.

"After all," he suggested, "now the wood was gone off it, you didn't have any use for it. It wasn't convenient to pasture there."

Esther nodded brightly. She was not one to cry over spilled milk. "It wasn't any use to us," she agreed. "Though, of course, I hated to see it go."

"As long as you have the Marshall Meadows and the home place here, you'll have all you can take care of," Arthur said.

"Almost too much for Caleb, I think it is, some times," Esther assented. She considered for a moment. "I've thought some that we'd do well to sell the Mason place, too."

Her voice was quite serene; but both Caleb and Dora understood what the mere admission of this possibility must cost her. Caleb had further proof, a little later, of how deeply she was moved; for when Dora and Arthur Tuck left the room together and went out into the front yard, she did not move to follow them.

Yet Esther had used to take such pains to see that these two were never left alone.

## IV

It is probably accurate to say that Arthur Tuck and Dora had loved each other for fifteen years; yet there had never been anything swift or ardent in their passion. Even if Esther could have been left out of account, they would nevertheless have moved slowly. Arthur Tuck's father had farmed about a hundred acres of land toward North Fraternity; he had been a man of some substance, perhaps second only to Ethan Dillard himself in the eyes of the town. Arthur went to the University of Maine and afterwards studied law, and because of these experiences, a glamour always hung about his head. Dora could remember when he went away to college; they had seen each other, at long intervals, since the time they were children; they did not see each other again after that departure for an interval of years. He established himself in East Harbor and began the laborious task of building up a practise. An occasional visit to his father's home brought him to Fraternity, and eventually he and Dora once more came into contact. She was at that time thirty years old; he about two years older. She was pretty, in a plump, comfortable fashion; she had been putting on weight for a year or two and was at the border line between plumpness and something less attractive. Arthur, prematurely aging, almost unnaturally gaunt, was attracted to her at their first encounter after the years of his ab-

sence; he sought opportunities to see her again. Within a year he had become a regular visitor at the Dillard house; he never failed to stop there on his way to or from his father's farm. When his father eventually died, he still continued coming, and it became a matter of remark in the village.

Had it not been for Esther, it is probable that at the end of a discreet five years or so of courtship, he and Dora would have been quietly married. But Esther scented danger before Dora had confessed even to herself how much she liked Arthur; and from that day on, Esther did all she could to retard the progress of their intimacy. It is almost literally true that for the first seven years they were never alone together; then the death of someone in the Howe side of the family summoned Esther to attend the funeral, and Dora must stay at the farm to take care of the cream. Esther was gone three days and Arthur saw Dora twice in a fashion they found thrillingly clandestine. For anything that passed between them, Esther might as well have been present, and they were both enormously ill at ease, yet each found an unreasonable delight in the situation. Caleb kept in the background, willing that Dora should have this small measure of happiness.

The following spring Arthur succeeded in maneuvering matters so that he and Dora took a drive one Sunday afternoon. This day was a landmark in the eyes of them both; years later they would remind each other fondly of "that afternoon we took our first drive."

In the fall of the year she was thirty-nine years

old, Dora went to Bangor on a week's visit, and Arthur went up with her from East Harbor on the boat, and a week later went up to return with her. These two journeys marked the second great adventure in their lives. They were so accustomed to the gentle grandeur of the countryside that the panorama of the river valley did not greatly move them; but the fact of being alone together, of traveling together, seemed to them both mysteriously sweet and beautiful. This became another of their treasured memories; it laid a spell upon them both, so that for a fortnight thereafter each felt the pulse of romance beating loud. Under this spell they had their first secret meeting. Dora's habit for many years had been to take an occasional walk alone about the farm; Arthur, knowing of this, dared suggest that it would be pleasant to take such walks together. By uncertain advances, interrupted by alarmed withdrawals, they reached a common ground; she told him she would walk up to the Bartlett Woods on a certain afternoon, if the day were fair. Arthur met her there. At long intervals, they repeated the adventure, till Esther discovered what was afoot, and reproached Dora so scornfully for such tactics at her age that Dora was shamed into abandoning them.

They came, by long and painful stages, to a certain mental and spiritual sympathy which made it unnecessary for them to put into words the deeper emotions which stirred them both. It is not accurate to say that Arthur ever asked Dora to marry him. Their minds approached the subject circuitously and slowly, and met at last in a

wordless understanding. One Sunday night when he had come for dinner and spent the day, she went with him into the barnyard as he prepared to drive away. Darkness protected them; he touched her hand; their lips met in their first kiss. His departure was like a flight; and as for Dora, when she re-entered the kitchen Esther perceived that she was trembling and shaken, and knew it had been a mistake to permit them this moment alone. Dora was at this time forty-two years old. A year later, for the first time, they openly spoke to Esther of the possibility of getting married.

Esther's policy, up to this hour, had been to hinder the progress of their affection, to delay the process of mating which in their case thus preceded marriage. So long as it was possible to keep them from reaching an accord of mind and heart, she did so. When this should be no longer possible, and not before, she would permit herself to be driven into open opposition.

She was in this, as in all matters that pertained to her authority, skilful and wise. She understood to what a pitch of resolution they must have forced themselves before speaking to her at all; knew the unwisdom of opposing them in this hour. They had chosen a moment when Caleb and Aunt Mary were out of doors, so that the three were together in the big kitchen. Esther heard what Arthur had to say, listened with a little nodding smile, and when he was done said amiably:

"Why, yes, Arthur. I don't see why you and Dora shouldn't get married one of these days." She spoke the words in a tone so matter of fact that they were vaguely chilled. Their enthusiasm

was quenched; they were abashed at seeing the thing they had scarcely named to each other thus dragged quivering into the light of day. Arthur said uncertainly:

“Well, that’s good of you, Esther.”

“Of course, I knew you’d make up your minds to it some day,” Esther remarked mildly. “We’ll have to think about it. No matter how much you may expect a thing, it always comes as a surprise. We don’t want to hurry, do we.”

She seemed to constitute herself their ally; they had been so fearful of her opposition that they were almost pathetically grateful. They were glad when she dismissed the matter with so little remark, and thankfully agreed to her suggestion that they would all have to think about it. A year later, they were still thinking. . . . Then the two were driven to consult her again.

It did not occur to either of them to marry and consult her afterward. Arthur had done well; he was able to give Dora anything she might reasonably expect. But he knew her deep dependence on her sister, was himself so definitely under Esther’s spell that an open break seemed to him inconceivable. The thought once or twice occurred to him; but each time he remembered Esther’s attitude toward Leon, remembered the implacable anger which still kept her brother’s name from her lips, and he lacked the courage to submit Dora to such a long ordeal.

When, reluctantly enough, they did at last urge upon Esther the fact that both their lives were speeding, that each day gone was a day gone forever, they met a new aspect of her resistance.

They were not surprised; it had been obvious to Dora that Esther was hardening against her. She had detected a bitterness in the elder sister's tones. Esther now showed anger; she said Dora was needed at home; that their affairs were in disorder, their very livelihood secured only by constant struggle and compromise. "This big house needs two women," she insisted. "I do what I can; but I simply can't handle it alone." She accused Dora of wishing to desert her; and Dora could not bear the accusation. So the conflict was again postponed.

From that time on, Esther began a systematic effort to shake and weaken Dora's intention; she sought to withdraw her sister from her allegiance to Arthur. At one time she was gentle and appealing, at another dominant, at another angry. She professed more than once her surprise that Dora should even contemplate leaving home, leaving her and Caleb to worry along alone. Esther had resolution, determination, persistence; Dora had none of these qualities, could combat them only by reason of the strength her affection for Arthur gave her. Under these circumstances it was impossible that she could beat down Esther's resistance; she could only cling to her hope and her love and wait for what deliverance time might bring to her.

This condition had existed for almost two years, and still existed unchanged at the time the Pond lot was sold. It might have continued indefinitely; there was no relief in sight. But about a week after the sale of the Pond lot, Dora got a letter from Leon.

I haven't written to you but twice since I came away, [he said apologetically]. But it wasn't because I didn't think of you; and I knew you'd get the news from Caleb.

Jennie liked you, and has always remembered you. And now Jennie says she wants our baby should be named after you. I want it, too.

Jennie says she'd like it mighty well if you'd come and see us and visit for a spell. We'd like to have you come next week. You know Jennie always likes having the babies christened; and she thought maybe you'd want to be at the christening.

I hope you will come. I can come and get you if you want; or I might meet you in East Harbor. You let me know and I'll do anything you say.

The children all want to see their Aunt Dora. I expect you'd like it here for a spell. You better come.

Caleb brought this letter with the other mail from the store one evening. Dora read it with a strange exultation; it dropped in her lap and she sat with wide eyes staring before her, and tears formed in them slowly. Leon had five little children now, and she had never seen them, though Caleb had brought home and showed her a picture of Mary and another of Sam. She sat so still that she was unconscious what went on about her till Esther remarked her state and asked evenly:

"What is it, Dora?"

Dora held out her letter with a slow gesture. "It's from Leon," she said; and Esther's hand, lifted to take it, dropped into her lap again. Esther made no comment; and Dora said slowly: "They want to name the baby after me. I'm glad, Esther. And they want me to visit them."

Esther responded by not even a gesture; she had from the beginning ignored Leon or appeared

not to hear when they spoke of him; Dora must have expected this reaction from her sister. Nevertheless, it waked a faint anger in her heart, hardened her voice. "And I'm going," she said. "I'm going, right away."

Esther must have wished to oppose this: but she could not well do so without referring to Leon, and she would not speak of her brother. Pride sealed her lips, made her remain passive while Dora laid her plans.

Arthur Tuck, whose business sometimes took him to remote parts of the county, had the year before bought an automobile. Dora, her courage stimulated by Esther's non-resistance, wrote to him and asked if he could not take her to Leon's farm. He came out from East Harbor as soon as the letter reached him, and they made their happy plans. Four or five days after Leon's letter came, Dora was ready; her bag went into the rear of Arthur's little car. As she took her seat, she looked back and saw Esther standing with a stony countenance in the kitchen door, Aunt Mary in the kitchen behind her, Caleb on the stoop. Caleb lifted his hand in a farewell gesture; then the car roared and they dipped down to the high road and away.

It was, as a prelude to the greater adventure, the first time Dora had ever ridden alone with Arthur in his car. The meadows along the way were at their greenest; the soft wood growth in the valleys had a deep luxuriance; the distant hills wore like a bridal gown their faint blue haze, of a color more true and pure than is to be seen on any other hills in any other countryside. Dora

was not alive to the beauties of the land; nevertheless, the excitement of this trip, the fact that she rode with Arthur, and the warm and welcoming beauty of the hills ahead of them combined to make this as happy an hour as she had ever known. They crossed Knox Ridge and left her own country behind; and her eyes searched more and more eagerly the way ahead.

## V

So prosaic a thing as a punctured tire delayed them on the road. It was Arthur's first experience of such an emergency; he was awkward and inept as he went about making repairs. Dora sat on a rock beside the road, under the shade of an old apple tree recently grafted with thrifty young scions, while Arthur labored. He became untidy; he skinned the knuckles of his hand when the jack handle let go; his collar wilted and his shirt sleeves were soiled. The effect of the delay was cumulative; the pump did not function as it should, so that it was hard to bring the mended tire to a proper consistency. Worse, the patch had been improperly applied; a slow leak developed. Arthur had to renew his efforts with the pump every mile or so. Their progress was slow.

Thus, though they had expected to reach Leon's by midday, noon found them still short of their goal. Arthur asked if Dora were hungry, and when she assented he stopped in a village on their way and bought two bottles of birch beer, a bag of crackers, two cans of sardines, and a wedge of

mild and friendly cheese. A mile beyond, on a well-turfed bank beside the road and with a brook at their feet, they had lunch together; and they made much of the occasion, sitting primly when a team or an occasional car passed by on the road, but for the rest of the time laughing like children. Dora, away from Esther's eye, was already a different woman; Arthur felt his love for her beating upward in slow pulses, as the tide throbs in across the sand. They went on at last almost reluctantly. Came, toward mid-afternoon, to Leon's home.

Leon's house was set on a hill; set on the shoulder of a ridge, so that on three sides the land fell away. Behind the house there lay a growth of old pine, and beyond in the lowlands a wide meadow reached to the foot of the rising ground beyond. The low hills swept in a quarter-circle from this point around the horizon; but in front of the house, across a deep valley and no more than two or three miles away, they rose more steeply into a high-shouldered ridge crowned with eminences like lifted heads at intervals here and there. The whole made a panorama where the eye could lose itself in beauty.

The house itself had originally been a small one, a story and a half high. To this Leon had added an extension two stories high and more commodious. In the other direction the house extended itself through the shed to the great barn. The barnyard was apart from the house itself; so that between the house and the road Leon had been able to maintain good turf, cropped reasonably close. A wooden pump stood here, a glass inverted

atop the plunger when the pump was not in use, as though in invitation to the passers-by. Three locust trees shaded the house; when Dora and Arthur drove into the dooryard these trees were all abloom, and vocal with the sweet hum of harvesting bees.

At the sound of their car, two children appeared in the kitchen door to see who was come, then came swiftly out into the yard. Jennie—she who had been Jennie Weir—was at their heels. She reached the car while Arthur was helping Dora to the ground, and as a matter of course took Dora into her arms and kissed her roundly. Dora was not used to being kissed; she was a little dismayed; but there was a spring of affection in Jennie which awoke a fit of response in most people, and without quite realizing it, Dora found herself reciprocating Jennie's hug, submitting with a stir of pleasure in her heart to Jennie's kiss.

"I'm right glad you've come," Jennie told her warmly. "I was wondering if maybe something had happened to keep you. We looked for you in time for dinner, but Leon said you'd probably had a breakdown." She looked toward Arthur and smiled at his wilted collar. "I guess you did," she decided. "This must be Mr. Tuck, I expect. I'm glad you brought him with you. We'd like to have you stay for a spell, too, Mr. Tuck."

Arthur answered with that faint inclination of the head which was a tribute he always paid to women. "I'm sorry. I only brought Dora. I have to be in East Harbor in the morning."

"Can't you come up while she's here?" Jennie was wholly hospitable.

"I'll come to fetch her home," he promised.

"Well, you plan to stay the night then." She turned to Dora, took her arm. "Come on in the house, both of you. You must be choked with the dust. I'll get you something cool to drink. The young ones will bring in your things."

The two children—Dora had watched them almost furtively, while they stared at her with friendly interest—swarmed into the car; another youngster appeared in the kitchen door as they approached, and Dora said: "This is Fergus. Caleb and the baby are asleep."

Dora asked: "Where's Leon?"

"He had to go down in the lower field for a spell. He said he'd probably hear the car and come right up. I'll send Sam down after him if he don't come." She helped Dora divest herself of her veil and hat and coat. "I'll show you where you're to sleep," she explained, and to Arthur added: "You can wash up right there in the sink if you want to, Mr. Tuck. We use the water from the pump, if there's none in the bucket."

The two older children came in as she and Dora started toward the stair. Mary had Dora's bag; Jennie told Sam to fill the bucket with water for Arthur, and left the two in process of getting acquainted while she took Dora's bag and led the way upstairs. The little girl followed them, and Dora said to her shyly: "You're Mary, aren't you?"

The child nodded, smiled. "Yes, Aunt Dora!"

She seemed proud that she had remembered this form of address. "And that's Sam downstairs. He's my brother. I'm a year older than he is."

"He's as big as you are," Dora suggested, meaning to be friendly but succeeding only in being tactless.

"Well, boys are expected to be bigger than girls. But he can't do anything without breaking things."

Dora guessed her mistake. "I think your hair's so pretty," she said. "So fine and soft and sweet." Jennie, leading the way opened a door; and Dora forgot the little girl in the charm of the room before her. Her own room at home was grave and beautiful; the furniture had been treasured for generations, and deservedly; yet it wore an atmosphere of age, and the whole room seemed old and weary and mellow and impatient, in its dignity, of the eagernesses of youth. Dora had never understood this till she perceived the difference now. There was something comfortable and friendly and youthful in this room in Jennie's house. The bed was a quite commonplace bed of curly birch; the little rocker matched it; there was a high chiffonier, and a low table with a mirror, and a straight chair, all of the same delightful tone. The whole seemed so sprightly and gay beside her smoky old mahogany and ancient maple. While Jennie was opening a window, smoothing the quilted coverlet, adjusting the fresh towels on the stand, Dora, used to the quiet ways, felt herself confused, uncertain, curiously happy; and when Jennie and the little girl left her alone, she stood for a while at the window, look-

ing out through a well-kept orchard where the ground was freshly cultivated, to where she caught a glimpse of an extensive garden beyond. Unaccountably, her eyes filled.

After her first uncertainties, as though she had been feeling her way, she plunged into the life at Leon's farm with an eagerness that was almost avidity. She rose early, as though afraid of missing an hour of it; and as soon as they heard her stirring, one or two of the children were sure to come to her room and talk to her while she dressed, and hang to her hands when she went downstairs. They dragged her here and there to show her all their treasures; she was forced to climb into the mow of the barn, where the hay was low after supplying the steady drain of the long winter; she was led through the orchard to see the birds' nests; guided down the hill to the hidden river in the woods below and taught to fish for yellow perch. She played "house" with Mary till Sam and young Fergus insisted that she come and play "goal" with them. She and Mary together were nursemaids to young Caleb, just two years old and a stout walker, though his tongue still stumbled. On the second day, under Jennie's laughing direction, she learned to bathe the baby, the little girl who was to bear her name. Dora was so frightened that her hands shook and her teeth chattered; when she laid the soft little body on the towel across her knees it was like to bounce off! But on the second day she was more sure of herself; and on the third she hugged the baby to her bosom and made Jennie leave them alone together, and reveled in

the long hour before the baby wailed for sustenance and Jennie came and took it tenderly away. When Jennie gave the baby her breast, Dora found her own teeth clenched in a gust of fierce jealousy that tore and plucked and burned her so that she fled the room.

In the evening, when the children were abed, she and Dora and Leon sat about the kitchen lamp and talked and talked. Dora had not seen her brother for ten years; they had so many things to say. She never could reconcile the man he was with the boy he had been; for Leon was now broad and strong and sure of himself, with steady lips and eyes and a confident authority in his tones. She made them tell all that their lives had been, listening avidly; and sometimes as they harked backward, first Jennie and then Leon continuing the tale, remembering this and remembering that, Jennie would move her chair till it was beside Leon's and take his hand in hers. And sometimes she would come behind his chair and put her arms around his neck and lift his head and kiss him; and there were other moments when she was content to stand near him, her hand resting lightly on his head. One night she sat upon his knee, curling herself up as a child would have done. At first Dora was embarrassed at these demonstrations; she watched Leon, expecting to discover uneasiness in him. The Dillardes had never been demonstrative; yet Leon had kissed her on the day of her arrival, and once or twice he kissed her good night now. Under Jennie's caresses he showed no awkwardness or embarrassment; rather they seemed to rest and comfort him

when he was tired, to soothe him when he was disturbed, to increase his happiness when he was already happy and at ease. Dora saw that when he came in from the barn or from the fields, if he had been gone some little while, he was almost sure to put his arm around Jennie and kiss her; watching them as she did, she began to perceive the deep current by which they were both swept boldly and confidently forward on the stream of passing days. She caught a hint now and then of the rich springs of happiness and courage upon which they drew. Sometimes when Leon came back to the house after an absence of an hour or two and met Jennie, they would stand for a moment in a close embrace and speak a tender word or two, disregarding Dora's presence or forgetting it; and Dora saw that at such times their eyes met with a warm affection and a confident understanding which seemed to exclude her and all the world. When they all went upstairs to bed, Leon and Jennie would come with her to her door and stand and talk for a moment before saying good night; and Leon's arm was apt to fall about his wife's waist. At such moments, when they had turned way and left her alone, and she had shut the door, she felt herself swept by a hopeless hunger and longing such as she had never known.

But in the end it was upon the new baby that Dora's deepest emotions centered. Except when it was asleep, or when she had to surrender it to Jennie for nursing, it was almost constantly in her arms. She bathed it, attended to its comfort, played with it, sought to woo it to gummy gurgles

of mirth, dandled it on her knee, or held it close in her arms as she moved about the house. Once or twice on a warm afternoon she took the little thing into the orchard and spread a blanket there on which it might kick and squirm and discover its toes with new wonder at each discovery. Her first wonder, her first fear of the child was gone; her love for it grew like a fire. She was undergoing an emotional revolution; the effect upon her of the life here, of the atmosphere of affection which embraced them all, was cumulative, waxing from day to day. She was at one moment wildly happy in the present; at the next desperately afraid of the emptiness that must succeed to this full existence when she should go home.

The baby was christened on the last day of her stay. Jennie had decided the christening should be at home. After dinner she sent Leon to get himself dressed; she and Dora took the children in hand. Each had to be tubbed, then inducted into garments starkly clean and uncompromisingly starched. Mary was instructed to see that Fergus did not get himself dirty; Sam had Caleb in charge. Dora wished to dress the baby herself; but Jennie helped her. The minister arrived, and Arthur Tuck drove into the yard on his heels.

Dora had a moment alone with Arthur, and she found herself clinging to him, kissing him sobbingly; so that Arthur was bewildered and a little frightened till she wiped her eyes and smiled to reassure him. She went through the little ceremony with a high head.

After supper, after the children were all abed, Dora seemed still to be moving in a dream; she

was so silent, her eyes were fixed and misted. Jennie, watching her, at length drew Leon away. "Leave them together," she whispered. So Arthur and Dora had the kitchen to themselves, while Jennie and Leon went outside. But Dora, though Arthur sought to question her, found few words to say to him.

"It's been so sweet," she told him. "I hadn't any idea, Arthur. I never had such a happy time."

She was glad to be alone in her own room at last; she sat for a long time by the window, looking out blankly into the still, starlight night. By and by she went to bed.

Next morning after breakfast, she and Arthur started on the homeward journey.

## VI

When Dora got home, Esther met her as impassively as though she had never been away; but Caleb and Aunt Mary asked innumerable questions about her visit. Arthur, after bringing her to the door, had been forced to depart at once for East Harbor; Esther and Aunt Mary were busy in the house. So Caleb suggested that Dora come out with him to the slope above the barn where he had planted peas and beans and corn and the other vegetables they raised each year. While he worked, she stood near by and talked with him. She talked about the children; told how Mary was already wearing the airs of a young woman; told how rowdily Sam and Fergus rolled and tumbled together in their play. She spoke of

Jennie, with a slow, deep affection in her tones; and of Leon. Once or twice Caleb asked her questions about the baby; but her answers were so brief he thought she must have been disappointed in her namesake, and wondered at it. He was busy with his eyes upon the ground, so could not watch her countenance.

That evening, when they were all together, Aunt Mary's curiosity overcame her sympathy with Esther's point of view toward Leon; and she questioned Dora at great length and minutely. But Dora answered her in a restrained and awkward fashion, as though there was little to tell. Once or twice Caleb saw in her eyes a shadow of something he could not understand; a something foreign to Dora's nature as he had always known it. It puzzled and perplexed him.

In the day or two succeeding, both he and Esther discovered further evidences of a change in Dora. Neither spoke of the matter to the other; but each wondered, and each was watchful, and Esther waited, preparing herself to meet whatever should come of this. Caleb went so far as to ask Dora one morning if she were well; she nodded inattentively, and he explained:

"You seem kind of quiet; I thought perhaps you had a headache."

"No," she replied evenly. "My head is all right."

She was, during these two days, less given to speech than her habit had been; she had never been talkative, but neither was she ever curt. In her brief utterances, and in a certain rigor which sat upon her countenance now, Caleb caught a

faint likeness to Esther. He had never thought his sisters alike before. Esther was so small and thin and cold, while Dora had always been a little fleshy, and she was of a reasonable size, and it was always evident in her shy ways and her timid words that warmth dwelt in her. Now she was no longer shy and uncertain; her very cheeks seemed firmer. Caleb had in the end faint inklings of the truth.

But he and Aunt Mary were alike to be excluded from the revelation which followed. It was an evening when they had gone upstairs to bed; Caleb, who was usually weary at night, had slipped out of his clothes and was asleep almost at once. But the sisters, in their rooms divided by the narrow upper hall in which the stairs climbed, took longer to prepare for the night. Dora had undressed, hanging up her garments with characteristic care, draping her stockings over the back of the chair, setting her shoes precisely together on the floor. In her plain, flannel nightgown buttoned high at the neck and her felt bedroom slippers, she sat down on the edge of the bed and stared at the lamp on the small table. She had meant to open the windows and blow out the lamp and go to bed, but her own thoughts delayed her. Her hair was wound into a braid; the bangs in front were twisted into leather curlers.

By and by she rose and took from the closet a garment that might have been called a dressing-gown. It was of cotton crepe, a useful sort of stuff, since it need never be ironed. There were about it none of the graces usually associated with such a robe, for the buttons on its front

were plain and utilitarian bone, the collar was no more than a fold of the material itself, and it had not even a cord at the waist to give it shape and seemliness. Dora's large figure filled it almost too generously.

When she had put this on, she blew out the lamp for modesty's sake, and then raised one of the blinds and opened a window and sat in a low chair looking out into the night. She remained in this position for only a moment; then with a little sigh rose and opened the door into the hall, and crossed and knocked upon the door of her sister's room.

Esther asked, in her quiet voice: "Is that you, Dora?"

Dora answered: "Yes. I want to talk to you."

"I'm in bed," Esther replied.

Dora, in the dark hall, stubbornly shook her head. "You'll have to get up," she insisted. "I want to talk to you."

The effect of this revolutionary opposition seemed to be to paralyze Esther; there was for a moment no sound in her room. Then—perhaps she understood the moment had significance—she rose. Dora heard her stirring, heard the scratch of a match as the lamp was lighted. She thought with a part of her mind that the lamp chimney must still have been hot enough to burn Esther's fingers. After a decent interval, Esther opened the door. She had in the meantime closed her window, drawn the blind, and donned a dressing-gown of material and pattern identical with Dora's. She opened the door and Dora went into her room. Esther carefully closed the door be-

hind her; then, while Dora stood irresolutely, the older sister sat down in a rocking-chair by the table where the lamp stood, and waited for Dora to speak. There was a straight-backed, cane-seated dining-room chair of old mahogany near the window; Dora sat in this. She said slowly:

"I've got to talk to you, Esther."

Esther replied: "It's a strange time of night."

"We can be quiet," Dora explained; and Esther said mildly:

"Of course, I didn't mean to put you off."

Dora nodded. "Esther," she said slowly. "I've got to tell you about Leon; about the time I had up there."

She saw her sister's countenance grow hard, her eyes grow blank. Esther never seemed to hear Leon's name, never took heed when Dora and Caleb spoke of their brother. Dora was not surprised at her demeanor now; nevertheless, it faintly daunted her. She had vaguely hoped for resistance from her sister, hoped Esther would refuse to hear, so that she might have insisted. This passivity was harder to meet than open opposition; nevertheless, she mustered her courage and drove on.

"I know you don't pretend to hear anything about him," she conceded. "But I know you do hear. So you can just sit there and listen and I'll tell you. I've found out that Leon did right to marry Jennie, and that you were wrong to be against it. I'm sure of it, Esther. I've seen them myself; and anyone, seeing them, would be sure."

She hesitated, but Esther made no sign. "You're stubborn, Esther," Dora said accusingly.

"I've always known you were hard and stern; and I always knew you knew better than I did about most things. But you're wrong about this, Esther; and someone has to tell you so. Leon has done well; he's got a good farm, and he's making it pay him, and better all the time. Jennie's a good wife to him, and it's beautiful—it's beautiful to see them together." Her voice, always high, squeaked with emotion in a fashion pathetically ludicrous. "It's mighty nice to see the way they love each other.

"And their children are good children. The oldest ones are smart and cheerful and healthy, and the little ones are so cute, Esther. The baby's so little, and soft, and helpless. But she's so good natured. She just laughs at you all the time. . . ."

She had not planned what she meant to say; knew only that she must make Esther perceive the beauty and the happiness which dwelt in Leon's home. Now all the emotions which possessed her overflowed in unformed sentences and swift, exclamatory speech. It was as though she were alone and thought aloud; as though she stripped her heart bare. Once or twice Esther stirred uneasily, disconcerted by this naked longing which Dora now unconsciously revealed. For Dora spoke not of herself; she did not attempt to expound her own feelings. She only recited the things she had done; how she had played with this child and with that, how she had tended the baby and bathed it and comforted it when it was lonely, and how Jennie used to come to feed it and how it welcomed her. She spoke of Leon and what a man he was, so secure and strong and sure of

himself and the love of those about him; and she said how full his life was, and how warm and fine. "He kisses Jennie every time he comes back to the house," she cried; and at some movement of Esther's added: "Oh, I know how silly and disgusting you think that is; but you're wrong, Esther. It was sweet! It made me feel so alone. It's right to be fond of people, and to show them you're fond of them. I've always loved Leon and loved Caleb and loved you; but I'd never think of kissing any of you. We don't do those things; but we ought to, Esther. We ought to start letting each other see the way we feel. . . ."

In her great desire that Esther should understand she became incoherent. There was something tragic in this eagerness of hers; with her hair down her back and the ridiculous twists of leather on her forehead and her ugly garments accentuating her own lack of grace, she nevertheless wore a certain grandeur; she abased herself before her sister and was, in very abasement, sublime. All the bonds and inhibitions which had meshed her in and moulded her as with iron, through the long years of her weary life, now were loosed; she was free from every restraint, afire only with a yearning to make Esther see.

And Esther, sitting quietly in the low rocker, with her hands clasped across her waist in a manner curiously self-contained, rocked slowly to and fro with gentle motions. Her eyes were fixed and inattentive, and her expression was faintly questioning, as though she still waited for Dora to begin what she had to say.

It was a long time before Dora perceived that

Esther was not to be moved; it must have been an hour after her coming to Esther's door before she gave up the struggle. Her eager words failed, dwindled into silence; her disappointment bowed her shoulders; she sat for a long time without speaking. Then strength came slowly back to her, and a measure of righteous indignation, the indignation of the long-suffering meek. She said at last, in a cold and angry tone:

"I've told you all this, because I thought you might see, Esther. I wanted you to understand; I wanted to make you understand, if I could. Because I've decided to marry Arthur, right away."

Esther did lift her eyes at that; she met Dora's, smiling in a serene way. "You know, Dora," she said, "the minute you came to the door, I knew what you were going to say."

"I've waited; you've put us off and put us off," Dora cried. "I ought to hate you, Esther, for what you've robbed me of."

"I've never said you shouldn't marry Arthur," Esther reminded her reprovingly.

Dora shook her head. "No, you haven't said it out and out. But you've managed us and managed us and dodged and twisted and tricked." Her eyes were angry, her voice was hot. "Esther Dillard, you've a lot to answer for. I've always felt it, and I'm sure of it now. But I've been a weak thing, letting you decide things for me, letting you say what I should do. I've been a fool to let you; but you've been cruel, too, Esther. You've been cruel and selfish and cold."

Esther said mildly: "I know you don't mean

that, Dora, so I'm not angry. You know I've always tried to advise what was best for the family."

Dora shook her head. "I never could argue with you, Esther, and I can't now. I never could see what the family had to do with my marrying Arthur. I guess there's always been more or less marrying in our family; but you've always acted like marrying was something vulgar, that decent folk wouldn't do. I knew you were wrong, but I was afraid to say so. You could always out-talk me."

"You're exciting yourself, Dora. There's no need of that at all."

Dora lifted her hands impatiently. "All right," she exclaimed. "As long as that's settled, then."

"What is it that's settled?" Esther asked. "I only know that you are tired and worked up and sleepy. You ought to be abed."

"It's settled that Arthur and I get married."

"I've always expected you'd get married someday, Dora."

"But your some day was always some other day," Dora cried. "Well, it's not, now. I'm going to get married right away."

"Have you and Arthur talked it over?" Esther asked.

"No. I've been thinking for myself. I'm going to write to him tonight, and we're going to be married inside of two weeks. I've always said I wanted to be married in June, and here it is the middle of June now."

"You talk to Arthur," Esther advised. "I'm sure he'll agree with me that there's no sense in

such a crazy hurry, after you've known each other all your lives."

"All our lives!" Dora choked and swallowed and said pitifully: "Yes, all our lives. We'd have been married ten years ago if it wasn't for you. Now our lives are gone. I'm forty-five years old this minute, and he's forty-seven. And that's your doing, Esther."

"Mine? You never said a word to me till lately."

"I didn't have to say a word. I couldn't say a word. You've always just had to look at me!"

Esther said gently: "You'll find Arthur will say you ought not to hurry so. You'll want some new clothes. A year from now, if you want to get married in June."

"Not a year!"

"Then later on in the summer. You're too old to want a June wedding, Dora. It's only girls that pay any attention to things like that."

"I want to be a girl," Dora cried in a voice like a wail. Her nails bit her palms. "Oh, Esther, I wish to God I was a girl again. I'd do so different."

Esther said sharply: "Don't be silly! Go back to bed, Dora. We can talk about it when Arthur comes out Sunday."

Dora clung chokingly to her determination. "I'm not going to go to bed. There's no use your talking. It don't do a mite of good, because I won't listen to you. I'm going to write to Arthur tonight to come out; and I'm going to marry him right away."

Esther sighed. "Well, if you will be unreason-

able. "As soon as we can get ready. It will take time, though."

Dora boiled over. She came to her feet and strode toward her sister with a swift, ferocious movement, so that Esther was almost frightened. "No! No!" she cried in a voice like a scream. "You've always had reasons and delays and put things off. I won't let you. I won't let you do it again. You haven't anything to do about it. I tell you we're going to get married right away. Next week. And you sha'n't stop us, Esther. You sha'n't. Oh, times I think about it all, I could kill you!"

Esther summoned her courage; she was never a coward; she rose to her feet and faced her sister. "You're crazy, Dora," she said sternly. "Keep still! You'll wake Aunt Mary and Caleb. I'm not going to have you make a fool of yourself over Arthur Tuck, at your age. You go back to bed."

Dora seemed to chew unuttered words; her jaws worked, her placid, round face was contorted. Suddenly and without a word she caught her sister by both shoulders and shook her, in a towering fury; she felt faint surprise to find that Esther was so small and so easily shaken; she was instantly ashamed of her own violence, and thrust Esther down into her chair with a final pressure that jarred the older woman like a blow. "You sit down!" she cried thickly. "You be still! You let me alone!"

For a long moment she seemed to crouch above Esther; and Esther adjusted herself in her chair with little nervous movements, as though she half-

feared she might find herself broken in many places. Then Dora drew back; she crossed the room; she turned and leaned against Esther's low dressing-table, her hands resting against its edge, her head lowered, her eyes fixed on her sister. She was panting heavily, gasping for breath. Esther lifted her eyes from the floor and looked at Dora; she seemed puzzled, uncertain. She had never guessed there were such depths in her sister; she was, abruptly, ready to submit; had a moment's dreadful fear that Dora would go away, shut her out, leave her to share with Caleb an empty world.

"We can't get the house ready," she said at last, almost pleadingly.

"Then we'll be married in East Harbor, by the justice of the peace," Dora replied implacably.

Esther shook her head; she rose. "We Dillards were always married at home," she said gently. Her surrender was now complete. "We'll manage, Dora." She moved a little toward her sister. Dora stared at her hard and long, unwilling to accept this yielding as genuine; she did not move till Esther's hand touched hers.

Then, all in an instant, the sisters were weeping in each other's arms.

## VII

The wedding was prepared in an atmosphere superficially cordial. Esther threw herself into the work that had to be done without complaint. She decided—and Dora, her main point won, was willing to accept Esther's decisions as she had al-

ways done—that they should be married in the parlor, the front room, and it ought to be papered for the occasion. Joe Frye, who lived in the village, had some skill at such work; he and Caleb did it together. Each night, when they were done, Esther and Dora laboriously cleaned up after them. The men were at the task three days.

Dora needed new clothes. The two sisters and Aunt Mary sewed almost constantly for the ten days before the wedding; and in addition Dora went to East Harbor and bought a new suit, in which she would be married. She urged a similar extravagance upon Esther; but Esther smiled and refused.

“I’m not getting married,” she reminded her sister.

Thus the old Dillard house was during these hurried days a place of outright tumult and confusion. Caleb, except when he worked under Esther’s orders, kept himself out of the way. He had expressed at once his approval of the marriage; had said to Dora in a dogged tone: “I’ve always thought if a person wanted to they ought to.”

She answered wistfully: “I wish you’d married, Caleb. It’s made such a difference in Leon.”

If he winced inwardly under the implied comparison, he did not let her see his suffering. Caleb had learned to accept himself as he was; he was long since done with hopeless striving.

Arthur Tuck met his long-delayed good fortune with a grave equanimity which concealed his fears. He had always wanted to marry Dora; had at least wanted it for as long as he could

remember. But now that the thing was within his grasp, he was not so sure; he had misgivings, doubts, and fears. Arthur had lived as a bachelor for so long; he trembled at thought of the changes Dora must make in his manner of life. Yet mingled with these fears were others, infinitely more acute. He feared that even now something would prevent the marriage. He was afraid to go forward, yet afraid to stand still; it was not hard to feel a certain pity for Arthur in his perplexities.

Dora had little time for him. She had written him a letter that was also a summons; had almost impersonally announced her decision and her victory, and when he came to her had found herself surprisingly clinging to him with her arms around his neck. His astonishment made him rigid and still; she had a moment's terrible fear that he did not want to marry her after all. She had heard of such things. . . . But Arthur was able to reassure her.

When Dora was done with him, she thrust him aside; she had so many things to do, while he needed only to prepare himself for the day. But Esther made an occasion to have speech with him. She told him how happy she was that he and Dora had decided to get married; she said she expected he would make Dora a good husband. "Of course," she explained, "she can't bring you much except herself, Arthur. If father had lived, things would have been different. But as it is, she'll only have her share of what little remains to us here."

He protested that he did not want Dora to

bring him anything. He did not put this on sentimental grounds; to do so would have been affectation. "I have a good practice," he explained. "And I've had no one to spend on, all my life. I've plenty."

Esther shook her head. "We wouldn't feel right if Dora didn't have something of her own," she insisted. "Of course, it will mean selling off some land."

"Now don't you think anything about that," he urged. "Dora wouldn't want it, and I don't want it. You and Caleb will need it all."

"Caleb and I don't need much," Esther replied. "Of course, we had over four hundred acres when father died, where we've got less than three hundred now. But that's plenty. It's really too much. Sometimes I think Caleb and I will be better off for selling some. And then Dora can have what she's entitled to."

She was for a long time stubborn in this insistence on dowering Dora; but in the end, when Dora united her urgencies to Arthur's she allowed herself to be over-persuaded. Thus Dora went to her husband with little more than the clothes she wore. This was a circumstance with which Esther would always reproach herself.

They were married a little after noon, so that they could drive to East Harbor afterward in time to take the boat for Boston, where they would spend a few days. Only half a dozen people were invited to the wedding. Esther wrote these invitations; but Dora, on her own account, and without consulting Esther until after the deed was done, wrote and urged Leon and Jennie to come.

When the letter was gone, she confessed to Esther; but Esther seemed not to hear what she said, and Dora's happiness was marred by fear of what Esther might do if Leon came. The danger disappeared when Leon replied that he and Jennie could not manage the trip. He was unusually busy on the farm; Jennie was involved in household affairs. Dora, reading between the lines, understood that he was not willing to intrude himself upon Esther. She wrote again, telling her brother how she would miss his face among the others; but the matter rested there.

Arthur came out from East Harbor in his car, freshly washed and polished till it shone, and with a new tire to replace the one that had played him false on the trip to Leon's farm. Dora was waiting in her own room. Caleb met Arthur, and he and Arthur put Dora's suitcase and small trunk into the rear seat of the car. Then Caleb took Arthur to his own room to make ready; and a little later someone started to play on the old organ downstairs, and they went down and were married. Esther had salmon salad and home-made root beer and cake ready on the table in the dining-room; there was an interval when they all stood about this table, laughing nervously together, talking in high-pitched voices, painfully striving to be gay.

Dora needed not to strive. Her countenance was transfigured. She was not, could never be a lovely figure; she was too stout, her cheeks were too round, her hair was too dull. But her eyes were beautiful in this hour; so beautiful that Caleb could not help watching her. Arthur was

in a sad state of confusion; his thin hair was all awry, his mustache unkempt, and on his bony brow beads of sweat stood glistening. It was a relief to everybody when Caleb at last reminded him that to catch the boat he must be starting soon.

So they drove away, and Dora waved good-by from the front seat of the car, and they disappeared where the road entered the low lands through the alder swamp toward East Harbor. As soon as they were gone, the others started to go. By supper time, Caleb and Esther and Aunt Mary were left alone in the big house, which seemed now unusually still.

Esther asked Caleb if he wanted her to cook supper; and he assured her he was not hungry, so they ate lightly of the remnants of the luncheon. Caleb left her and Aunt Mary to clear away the dishes and put the kitchen in order while he drove to the village for the mail. When he came back, he found them settled in their accustomed chairs about the kitchen lamp, as though nothing had happened. The only difference lay in the fact that while his own chair was waiting, Dora's was pushed back against the wall. While he read his paper, the two women discussed over and over the simple details of the great event, till at last it was time for bed. Then Esther, going to the mantel for her lamp, remarked:

"I'll empty Dora's lamp and put it away tomorrow."

Caleb, vaguely feeling that some comment was required of him, said: "Yes. Yes, she's married now."

"I expect she'll live to regret it, too," Aunt Mary announced pessimistically.

Esther smiled a little, in a fashion faintly triumphant. "At least," she suggested, "we have one comfort." They both looked at her expectantly. "She won't be having any children, anyway," she explained.

Aunt Mary nodded with satisfaction that was like an echo of Esther's feeling. Caleb said nothing. So they took their ways to bed.



### PART III



THE life of a nation, a community, a family, or of a single man may be divided into three parts. The first part is the period of growth, when everything waxes, the powers do daily show increase, strength is constantly augmented, and the tally of achievements grows longer year by year. The second is the period of stagnation. It is not always easy of perception, for the fruits of the period of growth are all about; the nation, the community, or the man seems prosperous, well ordered, well to do. All seems to go on as before; and only the acutest observation discloses the fact that there is no longer any growth or any progress or any new achievement. The third is the period of decay; it begins slowly and in small degree and accelerates year by year. Only in the later stages may the casual eye discover its progress except over long periods of time. You see this man today and a year from now, and he seems as he was before; you see him today and ten years hence, and you perceive that he has retrograded, that his powers have failed, that his substance has been dissipated and his strength is no longer in him.

This cycle seems to rule all life. Nations rise and fall; communities and cities pass through periods of prosperity and alternating periods of stagnation and decay. Families which are great in one generation are insignificant in

the next. Men and women, your neighbors, reach their apogee and then visibly decline.

Fraternity is nowadays in a period of decay. The number of abandoned farms increases year by year; incorporated towns are on the verge of relapsing into plantations; valley lands which cut a fine crop of hay twenty years ago are now gone back to alders and to marsh. Only here and there one man more industrious or more skilful than another is widening his acreage of tilled lands, laying away his substance, increasing his powers. Most of the farmers are content with subsisting. So long as the little farms will furnish a living, men cling to them; when at last they are driven to the cities, they depart and grass grows tall in the farmyards, and urchins break the window-panes with stones, and spiders spin their webs across the doors. A farmhouse which a month ago was filled with life, abandoned in the meantime, assumes in a matter of hours an atmosphere of neglect and decay so that it is hard to believe people have dwelt there within a generation's time.

To visit such a community for a few days is to receive the impression that it is already dead; but its condition is worse than death. It is not dead, but dying. Death is peace; but dying is a painful process, often long drawn out. Fraternity had been dying for twenty years and more. The wooded lands encroach on the farms, widening their kingdom year by year; and the deer and moose and the wildcats that were banished fifty years ago have come again. It is like the letting in of the jungle. The wild things grow more bold

year by year; encountered on a lonely road, they stare at man as though he were the trespasser.

To perceive the true condition of Fraternity it is necessary to visit it at intervals of years. Twenty years ago men had begun to note the fact that more farms were being abandoned than were being opened up; ten years ago this process had already attained momentum, the young people were going, the town was become a place where dwelt only men and women of middle age and past. Today the tragedy is well nigh accomplished.

There are families whose cycle coincides with that of the town; they founded themselves in the soil; they prospered and thrived; they reached a high point, stood for a while apparently secure; and then, with increasing speed, they began to fail.

For four generations, the Dillard and the town had gone hand in hand. Together they were dying now.

## I

When Dora married, there were left in the old Dillard house only Caleb and Esther and Aunt Mary Howe. Dora went to East Harbor to make a home for Arthur Tuck. At first they came out to dinner every Sunday; things were on the surface little changed. Caleb farmed the place as he had in the past, a little less energetically year by year; Esther and Aunt Mary kept the house as scrupulously clean; and once or twice Dora spent a week at home with her brother and sister.

Marriage had worked a change in Dora, though

not so marked a change as it had worked in Leon. She lost a little weight, and her flesh became more firm, and her eyes lost their humility and acquired a certain subdued gaiety, as though she found life pleasant and amusing. In them now and then a shadow lurked; for, as Esther had said with so much satisfaction, she would never have any children. But Dora accepted this cross as in some measure her punishment for her long cowardice and submission; she did not nurse a grudge against her sister.

Nevertheless, by slow degrees they grew apart; Esther's life was narrow; she saw few people; her days followed a modest round of household duties; her evenings were spent in talk with Aunt Mary and Caleb, or in reading and re-reading magazines which Arthur and Dora occasionally brought to the house. Her interests, always narrow, became more and more restricted; she settled into an increasingly rigid routine, to which she clung.

Dora, on the other hand, found new interests. She had always been more inclined to friendliness than Esther; had always known a few people in East Harbor. Arthur knew everyone there; and the little city made his bride welcome with all the cordiality natural to small communities. Dora joined the Study Club and the Travel Club; she found pleasure in a regular attendance at church; she learned to play bridge; and when she and Arthur were not otherwise occupied, they sometimes went in the evening to a moving picture show. In the winters, when the great snows blanketed the streets and the sidewalks were

ravines drawn between great white walls, the people of East Harbor kept indoors by day; but they were apt to gather in the evening for cards, for gossip, for a church supper, or a club meeting. . . . Dora enjoyed this; she blossomed under these influences; her interests widened.

Sometimes, at the farm, she tried to tell Esther of this new life of hers; but Esther, though she listened politely, was obviously uninterested. She and Aunt Mary found pleasure in hearing the gossip of East Harbor; they liked to be told that this man's business was failing, that that newcomer bade fair to be successful, that this man's wife was driving him away from home, and that that one's bride was wasting his substance in extravagance. Beyond this their interest did not go. Dora learned at last to speak only what they wished to hear; by degrees she came less often to the farm, and sometimes a month passed, even in the summer-time, without her taking Sunday dinner there. The long winters, when traveling was difficult, kept them apart from November till April; the cleft between the sisters widened.

Six years after Dora's marriage, Aunt Mary died. That woman of iron was almost eighty years old, yet to the end, save for her increasing deafness and her failing memory, seemed in full possession of her powers. Every morning she helped Esther with the beds or wiped dishes while Esther washed them. Now and then she baked bread or cake or pies; for Esther had never done well with pastry. Aunt Mary always fried the weekly supply of doughnuts. Caleb liked them short, and Esther's were apt to be tough. In the summer

the older woman did the preserving, and Esther at this season worked under her directions. Up to the week of her death they had no warning that her end was near. Then one evening—it was in January, and bitterly cold—she broke a window-pane in her room by allowing a chair to rock against it. She had for years lived in constant terror of drafts, had been accustomed to sleep with her windows closed; and Esther urged her, this night, to sleep in one of the other rooms. Aunt Mary insisted that she must have her own bed; but in the morning she confessed she had been cold, and that evening she began to sneeze. Her fever rose; she acquired a cough; her lungs were affected, and quite peacefully she died. The day before her death was Saturday, baking day; she wished to rise and fry doughnuts, but Esther compromised by mixing them under her rigid direction, at the very bedside. When Esther brought a sample upstairs, and Aunt Mary had satisfied herself of its mediocrity, she said in austere tones:

“There, you’ll never learn to do them right, Esther.”

Thereupon she went to sleep, and spoke no more for the few hours of life that were left to her. Snow was deep upon the roads; frost had locked the earth within a crust of iron. They bore her body to the receiving vault to lie there and await the release of spring before interment.

Arthur and Dora came out from East Harbor by sleigh, to attend the funeral; the journey was a bitter one, and snow falling that day kept them at the farm till the roads could be broken out

again. When they returned to town, Caleb and Esther fell easily into their ancient round once more. Morning, noon, and night Caleb tended the stock huddled in the barn; morning, noon, and night Esther cooked their meals and washed the dishes; every morning she made the beds.

One evening a week after the funeral, Caleb found his sister weeping; but when he would have comforted her, she resented the fact that he had discovered her weakness, and put him angrily aside.

They had sold the Mason farm, the year before. The mortgage upon it had grown a little, year by year. The place was fairly worth perhaps eighteen hundred dollars; but when the mortgage reached twelve hundred they could borrow no more, and gave up the struggle to keep the land. There was no ready purchaser; the sale wiped out the mortgage and left them no margin at all. Relief from the taxes upon the land thus sold eased their affairs in some small degree, but there was still a deficit. Two years later they began to sell cordwood off the Bartlett wood-lot.

The Dillard place now consisted of the Bartlett Woods, the home place, and Marshall's Meadows, down across the road; just over two hundred acres in all. Twenty years had cut their domain in half.

Esther still refused to speak Leon's name; but Caleb heard from him with increasing regularity, and now and then he read Leon's letters aloud, Esther not protesting, but pretending not to hear. Leon was doing well. His children were growing up; he wrote once that a young farmer in the

neighborhood was paying attention to Mary. Leon added that Jennie thought the two would be married when Mary was a little older. "I don't guess so, myself," he explained. "She ain't only seventeen." This news evoked a scornful exclamation from Esther; but she seemed to repent her weakness at once, and the rigidity of her countenance became so pronounced that Caleb dared not even read the remainder of the letter.

Dora and Arthur occasionally visited Leon; and Leon's affairs—he was marketing an increasing number of apples every year—often took him to East Harbor. On such visits he was accustomed to have dinner at Dora's house. He drove his own car, now. Between Dora and Leon old bonds strengthened, binding them more and more closely. Twice the little girl who bore Dora's name visited her aunt for a month or so at a time. The first visit came when she was seven; the next when she was eight years old.

In the ninth year after Dora's marriage, Jennie's mother died. Leon and Jennie came to the funeral, and passed the Dillard farm more than once in their car; Leon and Caleb encountered each other on the boundary between the two farms and to some small extent drew together again. Leon asked, one, day, whether he might not come and see Esther; but Caleb shook his head.

"She's never spoke your name," he said.

"I kind of thought she might come to Jennie's mother's funeral," Leon explained, in a wistful tone.

"Well, she wouldn't," Caleb replied.

Old Fergus was left by his wife's death very much alone; age was heavy upon him, he needed a strong hand about the place. His wife had died in the fall and that winter he managed alone; but in the spring when there was much work to be done, Sam, Leon's oldest boy, came to help him.

Young Sam was a stocky, sandy-haired boy in his eighteenth year; and he and Caleb at once became friendly. Caleb fell into the habit of wandering over to see Fergus in the long afternoons when work was done for the day. Sam discovered in Caleb something lovable and fine, and gave him a frank devotion which warmed Caleb's heart to the boy. Once or twice Caleb suggested that Sam come home with him to dinner; he was willing to risk Esther's wrath. But each time Sam asked:

"Did Aunt Esther say so?" And when Caleb was forced to answer in the negative, the boy shook his head.

"Father told me not to bother her," he explained.

Caleb confessed to himself a faint relief in these refusals; he had been afraid of Esther's wrath. But he continued to see a good deal of Sam in a more or less furtive way; and Dora and Arthur, whenever they came out from East Harbor, always went to see the boy. Also, Sam made friends in the village. Old Fergus let him go each evening for the mail, and the men he encountered in the store liked him, and one night he went to a dance in the hall above the store and met some of the younger girls who lived in the town.

When pressure of work at home permitted, Leon and Jennie sometimes drove down for an hour's visit at her father's farm; and at such times Sam would take his father into the fields and display his handiwork. "He'll make a farmer," Leon told Caleb one day. "He has the way of it at his finger's ends."

Caleb nodded. "Yes," he agreed. "Yes. He takes to it; and Fergus is a good teacher."

"You might get him to help you, sometimes," Leon suggested. "I'd like to think he was working on the home place."

Caleb smiled hopelessly. "Lord, I don't do enough to need any help," he confessed. "Esther and I, we just get along. And she probably wouldn't want him around."

Leon did not press the suggestion. Thus stood affairs in the spring of the tenth year after Dora's marriage.

## II

One Sunday late in May, Arthur and Dora appeared unexpectedly, just before dinner-time. When their car drove into the yard, Esther went to the door to meet them. "I declare," she said impatiently, "you might have let me know you were coming. Caleb and I eat so little when we're alone."

Dora laughed in an affectionate way, and took her sister's arm and led her indoors. "Now Esther, don't make a fuss," she urged. "We just decided to come at the last minute. And you know you won't have a telephone. It's a shame if we

can't come out without your stirring yourself all up, days ahead."

Esther sniffed and said: "It's a pity if I can't stand being stirred up a little, Dora. Does me good, I expect. But if you hadn't come, Caleb and I would just have eaten some boiled potatoes and bread and butter."

"Then I'm glad we came," Dora declared. "Now if you just would keep chickens!" She put her hat aside. "Well, there, we'll find something. Esther, I had to come. I had something to tell you. Leon and Jennie were in town last week with Mary, buying her wedding things. She's going to be married, the fifth of June."

At Leon's name, Esther as from long habit had put on her defensive armor; her countenance had frozen, her eyes gone blank. But Dora had begun to suspect, years ago, that in spite of this pose Esther was keenly interested in all that pertained to Leon and his children; she went on now, undiscouraged. "Mary's such a nice girl, Esther. You'll like her. She's a pretty little thing, with brown hair and brown eyes, like her mother used to have. Only she's small. And she always asks for Aunt Esther. She sent her love to you."

"I expect we'll just have to fry up some salt pork," Esther remarked abstractedly.

"Arthur and I are going up to the wedding," Dora continued. "We're going to drive up and stay over night. And Leon and Jennie told me to bring you. Leon said he'd write you if he thought it would do any good; but he thought maybe you'd come to see your niece married, anyway. And then Mary got me by herself after a

while, and she wants you to come. She said she wouldn't feel as though she were married if Aunt Esther weren't there." Dora smiled. "I told her she was a little fool to talk that way; but she stuck to it, good. She said she saw you once, when she was down to Mrs. Weir's funeral; and she liked you."

Esther, happening to look into the hall, exclaimed: "There, those men have left the front door open, and all the dust flying." She ran to close it. Arthur and Caleb were sitting on the little patch of turf before the door. The road that ran past the house was the main traveled route from East Harbor to Augusta; and many automobiles came that way. On this Sunday they passed every few minutes, dragging clouds of dust behind them. Esther had waged a hopeless warfare against this dust since the coming of the automobile; in the old days it had not been such a nuisance. She dusted and swept and sprinkled and scrubbed, and had faint hopes of victory until she took up her carpets in the spring. She shut the door now with an emphatic bang, returned to Dora.

"Don't you think you might go up with us?" Dora persisted, when her sister came back to the kitchen.

Esther shook her head. She did not speak; nevertheless, the negative was sufficiently emphatic. A moment later, as though by way of explanation, she said: "Caleb and I are going to be so busy. We've got to do something this year, you know. The cordwood's all gone off the Bartlett lot; and last year was so dry the hay on the

Meadows wasn't hardly worth cutting. We've usually had some to sell. We've got a big garden in and all. I declare, it's too much for Caleb and me to handle. The home place is really all we can use."

Dora looked at her with sudden attention. "Esther! You're not thinking of selling off the Meadows."

"They're not much use to us, Dora."

"But Father loved them so. They were the best part of the place for him. We can't ever let them go."

Esther nodded. "I know," she assented, in her quiet tones. "It don't seem as though we could, does it."

A moment later she spoke of something else, content that the talk had been successfully diverted from the dangerous topic of Mary's approaching wedding. They ate dinner together without again treading on forbidden ground; but Dora's eyes told Arthur that she had failed. After dinner, Arthur and Caleb disappeared; Esther asked no questions, but she understood that they had gone over to see Fergus and Sam. She and Dora cleaned up the dishes, then found a shaded spot under the old apple trees beside the house, and more remote from the dust of the road.

Toward mid-afternoon, Dora began to think it was time for Arthur to return. A little later, with a certain air of guilt about them, Arthur and Caleb came around the corner of the house, escorting young Sam, Leon's boy. They came forward steadily, shoulder to shoulder, as though this contact heartened them; and when Sam saw Dora

he took a quick step forward and cried: "Hello, Aunt Dora," and flung his arms around her and kissed her cheek. Dora hugged him warmly. Esther, pale and still, had risen from her chair and seemed about to move away. It was Caleb who said, almost sternly:

"Sam, this is your Aunt Esther."

Esther hesitated, her back toward them; then she slowly turned to face the boy. Sam stood for a moment, uncertain what to do. The cold and weary eyes of the old woman met the gay eyes of youth. Then Sam laughed teasingly, and exclaimed: "I'm just going to kiss you, too, Aunt Esther." And he did; but Esther stood as still and unresponsive as a post, so that he fell back from her as though she had rebuffed him.

"We're taking him up with us to Mary's wedding," Arthur Tuck explained, in his slow, uneasy tones. "That's why we brought him down here, Esther."

Esther's lips moved in an attempt at speech; but no words came. She turned and walked away from them, straight and rigid and unbending; and they watched her go in silence. When she had disappeared, young Sam said slowly: "Oh, gee!"

Dora touched Arthur's arm. "We'd better start back to town," she suggested in a low tone. Caleb saw them into the car, and they departed without having seen Esther again.

## III

Mahlon Hull, whom Mary was to marry, lived on a farm some three miles north of Leon's, with his mother and a sister, already middle-aged. He had been the only boy in a fairly large family; his other sisters, all older than himself, were already married and established in homes of their own. Since his father's death, half a dozen years before, he had carried the farm on his shoulders.

Although he was six years older than Mary, they had first seen each other in school, where some thirty children of widely varying ages had been grouped together. If Mary had ever heard of the proposition that all men are created equal, she would have been sure it was false as soon as she saw Mahlon. He was the biggest boy in school, and the gentlest, and the bravest; and from the time she was seven years old she gave him a blind adoration of the sort of which only little girls are capable. Mahlon at first perceived this with boyish disgust; he came by slow degrees to tolerate her; and in the end he found a certain pleasure in knowing how much she liked him. When she was on the verge of her teens a mantle of shy grace fell upon her and he perceived one day how lovely the child was become. Thereafter, he was almost equally her slave.

There was never any break in Mary's loyalty to him. When she was a little older and Jennie taught her to cook, she insisted on baking a batch of biscuits and taking them to Mahlon. In her fourteenth year she put up her first jelly and he must have a glass. One winter she knitted a

great pair of mittens for him. If she had gone out into the world, had seen other boys, it is probable that her devotion to Mahlon would have wavered; but she knew nothing outside the little farming town, and among his neighbors Mahlon did stand out, head and shoulders clear. So her ideal was never even threatened, and when she had passed the childish stage of open worship, she still clung to Mahlon in her most secret heart. When he was in his early twenties and she was in her middle teens, constraint descended upon them; they saw each other often, but their manner each toward the other was formal and restrained. Not till Mary was eighteen did Mahlon begin those open attention which gave their relation in that community a definite and respectable status of its own. Once or twice he took her riding in his buggy; when he bought a car she was the first to ride in it. Sometimes he came to Sunday dinner. If he found time to catch a string of trout, he brought a few to the house. In the fall he was apt to leave half a dozen woodcock at the door for her; and in the winter of her eighteenth year he came every Sunday and Wednesday nights to supper and sat in the evening with Mary, before the Franklin stove in the parlor, while Jennie and Leon and the other children too old to go at dusk to bed stayed in the kitchen with a closed door between.

Thus their courtship was, from the dispassionate point of view, mere routine; but neither Mahlon nor Mary felt any lack in it. If Mary had any yearning for romance, Mahlon satisfied it; if he craved beauty and sweetness and ardor

he found it in Mary. They were both well contented; and Jennie and Mrs. Hull were satisfied with the situation.

But Leon had a miserable time of it. Mary had been his first baby; she had always been and would always be dearer to him than any of the others. The thought of giving her up to any other man was terrible to him; and there was enough Dillard in Leon to dread and fear—for all his years with Jennie—this mystery that was unfolding before Mary's feet. He never spoiled Mary's happiness; never spoke critically of Mahlon; but it was because Jennie kept him in check. "Just you remember," she warned him over and over, "that Mary's going to go her own way in the end anyway. And if she marries Mahlon and has to remember all her life that you didn't want her to, and that you didn't like him, it's going to make her always a little afraid and resentful toward you. You mind what I say, Leon."

He protested desperately that Mary was too young to think of getting married and Jennie laughed at him. "I was nineteen," she reminded him. "You didn't think I was too young."

"You always seemed older, Jennie," he argued. "You were always a woman. It was different with us, anyway."

"It's always different when young folks are that way," she assured him wisely. "You just do as I say."

So Leon was brought at last to a passive acquiescence in the tides of life which flowed about him. He knew nothing of any definite plan for the wedding until Jennie announced it to him in

the privacy of their own rooms; before he saw Mary again, Jennie had brought him to a level frame of mind, and he was able to hide the sharper edges of his grief from the two young people most concerned.

Jennie and Mrs. Hull were both pleased with the turn of events. "She's a right sensible woman," Jennie confessed to Dora, the day before the wedding. "With some women I wouldn't want to think of Mary going to live in the house with them. But she's sensible; and Mahlon is crazy about Mary, and she is about him. And Mrs. Hull will know how to keep things going smoother."

"They won't be right in the same house, after next year," Dora reminded her. "Mahlon told me he was going to build on a wing, all separate, for him and Mary."

Jennie nodded. "I know. That will be nice, too. But Mrs. Hull will be good to Mary. And Mahlon's doing right well, since his father died. He's got a good orchard, and he puts in more trees every year; and he's a good farmer, too. Leon likes him."

"She'll make him a good wife," Dora suggested smilingly.

Jennie nodded. "Mary's like me," she replied. "She likes being out doors, and working in the ground and all. She can make better butter than me, right now."

Dora accepted this with a smile. Jennie, who had been an eager, splendid girl, was become a capable and serene woman and mother. Her brown hair had not lost its luster; she was as

straight and strong as she had been in youth. To the casual eye, save for the fine maturity in the mother's countenance, Jennie and her daughter might have seemed sisters. There was a warm understanding and affection between these two; and Mary, though she lacked her mother's stature, had the same atmosphere of wholesome health and vitality which Jennie had always worn like a splendid garment. However, as Dora now pointed out, Mary might be a fine housekeeper, but she could not compete with Jennie in any household art; and to say that she could was simply excess of fondness.

Jennie's eyes were soft. "Well, of course a body does think their own children are so fine," she said apologetically. Then, with an affectionate impulse, touched the other woman's hand with hers. "They really think almost as much of you as they do of me," she said reassuringly.

But Jennie and Dora had not much time to talk that morning. Mary must be made ready; the attire of the other children must be overseen. Sam could take care of himself, and Fergus, too. He was fifteen, now, and very like Leon in feature and in manner though he had his mother's coloring. Dora and Fergus between them dressed young Caleb and the little girl who wore Dora's name; and then they all combined to overpower five-year-old Ethan and make him clean and neat and keep him so.

It was this morning that Dora noticed for the first time, and with a certain pang of jealousy, the fact that her own namesake was so like Esther. The little girl, now ten years old, had all Esther's

poise and assurance and strong will; had even her low firm voice. None of the children looked like Dora; the fact made her feel weary and alone, as though she were excluded from even this much of happiness. There is no higher comfort, on the threshold of age, than to discover your own lineaments in a youthful countenance just coming to maturity.

Leon was the only jarring note in the concord of that day. Jennie took her daughter's marriage with a calm pleasure; she accepted it as normal and fine and beautiful. But to Leon, spite of all his resolution, it could not fail to seem little short of tragedy. He knocked half a dozen times at the door of Mary's room before Jennie at last admitted him; sat then on the edge of the bed watching the final stages of the process of dressing the prospective bride with such woeful eyes, that Mary came near tears, and Jennie sent him away.

"Out of here, now, Leon," she cried in good-natured impatience. "You and Mary will be crying together in a minute, and I'll not have any weeping at my girl's wedding. You go talk to Mahlon. I expect he's nervous as a witch downstairs."

Leon obeyed; and the countenance of the man his daughter was to marry reassured him. Mahlon was strong and kind and fine; he wore a humility which Leon approved. They two had an hour together, out of which Leon got some measure of comfort.

When the hour came, Mary was as sweet as any bride has a right to be, and Mahlon as badly

frightened as might have been expected. Mary spoke her responses in clear and even tones, like the pure note of a sweet bell; Mahlon stammered and stumbled through his. When the ceremony was over, someone laughed with hysterical relief; and then everyone laughed, and there was a great deal of promiscuous kissing; and everyone ate more than he wanted; and by and by a certain restlessness manifested itself and people seemed to wait for what came next. So in due course Mahlon and Mary drove away.

Mrs. Hull and Mahlon's sister would stay with another sister for a few days, so that Mary and Mahlon could have the farmhouse to themselves for a while. It was the busy season; Mahlon could not take time to go away. The two young people departed alone, in Mahlon's car; and young Sam and Fergus and Caleb tormented them at the end, and pelted them with anything that might serve as a missile; and everyone applauded this bombardment, and an old shoe knocked Mahlon's hat off. He would not stop to recover it, but Jennie rescued it from Fergus, and brushed it and put it away for him.

Not till it was all over did anyone remark the fact that Leon had disappeared. Then Jennie went to search for him, and did not return; and the wedding guests departed one by one, omitting the formality of farewells. Arthur and Dora were left with the children at last, and they had a happy time of it till Leon and Jennie reappeared. Leon was shamefaced and red about the eyes, but Jennie was determinedly cheerful.

Arthur suggested that some of them might want

to take a ride in his car. The children wanted to go, so Fergus and Caleb and little Dora were permitted to pile in. Jennie said she would stay to clean up, and Dora to help her. The car disappeared amid a final chorus of good-bys and admonitions. Fergus was warned to see that Dora did not fall out; Caleb was directed to hold on to his hat. When the car was gone, Leon and Jennie and Dora and young Sam looked at each other and wondered what to do next.

Only five-year-old Ethan, taking advantage of their preoccupation to forget his clean clothes and enjoy himself, seemed unconscious of the tension under which they all were laboring.

#### IV

Jennie said she supposed they might as well clean up. There were dishes to wash, and the furniture must be rearranged, and the flowers sorted and put where they would show to best advantage under a normal routine of living. The front parlor would have to be shut up again. Young Ethan had already soiled his best bib and tucker and ought to be put into his overalls. Dora said she would help; and Sam and Leon, uncomfortably afraid of being left alone with nothing to say to each other, followed the two women into the house and put themselves under Jennie's command. Jennie told Sam where to find some ordinary clothes for Ethan; then she decided the first thing was to wash the dishes. "I'll stack them and scrape them, and you can wash, Dora; and Leon and I'll wipe them together."

Dora said: "Why don't Leon just sit by the

window, where we can all talk. I expect he's tired."

"I'd rather be doing something," Leon protested; and the two women exchanged glances of amused understanding as they permitted him. Dora, more to divert his thoughts than from any curiosity, asked:

"Have you got your farming done, Leon?"

He nodded. "Yes. Yes, I finished the bulk of it last week. Nothing but cultivating, now, till it comes time to cut the hay."

"Leon's put in a big garden this year, since he got the tractor," Jennie explained.

"Does it work all right?" Dora asked; and Leon grew enthusiastic.

"Why say," he exclaimed. "It'll do more work than four horses. I had it out early in some marsh-land, down in the valley, pulling alder stumps. It yanked those stumps out just as easy. And I did all my plowing with it, and I used it to drag the duster around through the orchard, and the spray tanks. It'll do pretty near anything."

"Caleb saw one last year," Dora commented. "He went up to Winterport on the Farm Bureau tour and saw here they were using one there, that four of the farmers had bought together. He kind of thought it would be nice to have one; but he don't do enough farming to really need it."

"It pays me," Leon assured her.

"Well, you do a lot more than Caleb does."

"He could do more, if he had one."

Dora smiled. "I guess you know the way Caleb is. He'll do about so much; but that's all he can do."

Jennie spoke proudly. "Leon just seems to thrive on work," she exclaimed. "He's busy all the time. And not making barrels and doing road work, the way so many farmers do, while their farms run down. He puts all his time on the farm. If it ain't the chores—the boys do most of them now—or the farming, or the hay, or the apples, or the wood, its straightening the brook, or clearing out the alders somewhere, or clearing the stone off a field. He's cleared stone off of twenty acres since we bought here. He raised potatoes in the ground one year that brought him seven hundred dollars."

"I've put it all back into fertilizer since," Leon protested ruefully. "And we haven't had a right good potato year either."

"Well that's all right," Jennie loyally insisted. "You're putting into the farm all the time, and not taking out. It's getting better all the time instead of worse, the way the other farms around are."

He looked at her fondly, and Dora saw the affection in his eyes. "Well, you showed me how to do that," he said. "You and Fergus. Remember how you used to work in the fields when we first come here. Before Mary was born." His eyes became misty. "That's twenty years ago," he added, in a weary tone. "And her nineteen now, and married today."

"I'm as good a hand now as I was then, too," Jennie boasted, quick to divert him. "I can handle a team better than you can, Leon. You had to get that tractor that I can't run, just to

make me stay in the house." Her eyes were twinkling.

"We worked pretty hard, those days," he remarked. "But I guess it was worth it, wasn't it Jennie?"

"You talk like an old man," she chided. "You talk as if you were all through working. Anybody'd think to hear you, you expected to sit around, the rest of your days. Well you're not, if I have the say. I don't aim to have any man cluttering my kitchen." She came behind him—he stood at the sink, wiping dishes—and put her arms around his waist from behind and squeezed him till he grunted. "No sir, you're no old man yet."

Leon looked across the floor toward where his small son played, and he smiled at his wife and bent and kissed her, a plate in one hand, the towel in the other. "I guess I can't grow up much as long as you keep the house all littered with children," he complained teasingly.

"Well, I aim to keep it littered as long as I can," she retorted. "And Mary to help me, now!"

Dora—the ancient inhibitions still held her—felt her cheeks burn; but Jennie only saw that Leon had winced at the prospect her words conjured, and was quick to repair the mischief she had done. "They'll be the ones you'll be foolish over," she prophesied. "If Mary has a girl I expect she'll boss you around." She wooed a smile to his lips.

Young Sam, having attired his brother in a fashion fit for play, had wandered out of doors.

He might be lonely, but he did not care for dish-washing. Now that the task was nearly done he came in, and Jennie, busy putting dishes away in the cupboard, gave him a hug and a kiss as she passed him. "How's my big boy?" she asked. "I haven't hardly had a chance to make over you, Sonny."

Sam said he was fine. Dora, smiling at them both, remarked: "Fergus says Sam will make a farmer. And Caleb says it's wonderful the way he gets along."

Leon watched his son proudly. Sam grinned a wide grin; and Jennie asked: "Is that so, Sonny?"

"I've been working hard as I knew how," her son replied. His arm was around her waist.

"If he can satisfy your father, he's a good man," Leon asserted jocosely; and Jennie cried:

"Pa's all right. He's always worked hard, and expected others to work hard. I wish he could have come up today."

"He said he couldn't leave the farm," Sam explained; and Leon added:

"You might have known you couldn't get him away, busiest time of the year. Mary ought to have waited till August, when the hay was cut."

"She had too much of me in her," Jennie laughed. "If she had more of you, she'd have gone right on waiting. You never would have married me if I hadn't made you."

Dora said smilingly: "That's what I tell Arthur."

"Oh, every wife says the same thing," Leon

protested. "To hear you talk, Arthur and me just sat around waiting."

"Sam," Jennie cried to her son, with a gesture toward her husband, "you hear him. You wouldn't think, to look at what a big bold man he is now, that I had to do all the courting. Why he used to hide in the barn to get away from me." Leon, leaning against the sink, swept her into his arms, and she disengaged herself with a kiss. "Oh, you've learned your manners now," she confessed. Turned to her son again, with a little imp dancing in her eyes. "And Sam, I wanted to ask you. Pa said something about your going to a dance down there and taking a girl and everything. You haven't said anything to me about it."

They all looked at Sam, and perceiving his confusion, added to it by laughing at him. But Sam, though he might blush, was bold. He said stoutly: "Yes, I went to a dance over in North Fraternity one night."

His mother pinched his chin between her finger and thumb, fixing his eyes with hers. "Who is the girl you took, Sammy?"

He said appealingly: "Why, I just happened to ask Annie Maclure to go with me." She studied him for a moment, and her heart contracted; then she released him and spoke of other things. But Sam knew he would have to answer her questions by and by.

Their talk drifted back to Fergus, to his farm. Leon said soberly: "From what I saw when I was down their last, he's got about the only decent farm in town, now. Things seem to be going back all the time."

Dora nodded her assent. "People keep moving away."

"You can't keep taking out and never putting in," Leon commented. "They tell me a lot of the farms are just rented, now. A man rents for a few years till the place is worked out, and then rents somewheres else, and keeps moving on. You can't expect a man to take care of land unless he owns it. It's human nature."

"They can't do much," Dora argued.

"They don't want to do better," Leon insisted. "They're satisfied to just get along. They'll sell off a piece of land, or a couple of cords of wood, or a corner of the orchard, just to get a little money to get along on. Why I bought a little orchard up here last year, about three hundred trees, for less money than the apple crop brought me in last fall. Man that sold wanted to move away."

"You're lucky, Leon," his sister insisted. "Things happen for you."

"I've heard that all my life," Leon protested.

"You've got money to get along and do things," Dora urged. "Most folks have to sell when they can and get what they can."

"I didn't have money when I started. I tell you we lived on salt pork and boiled potatoes for a spell, more than one time. But I'd never sell a calf when I could pasture him two years and get real money for him. And I'd never sell hay as long as I had barn room for cattle to feed it to. And I'd never cut off wood faster than it grew. These farms right now are worth three or four times what I paid; and I've got money in the bank."

Jennie said slyly: "You've done wonderful well, Leon." He saw the twinkle in her eyes, and cried contritely:

"Lord, Jennie, I know well enough without you I'd never have done a thing."

Dora said thoughtfully: "Things are bad at home, too. Caleb—he's willing enough; but it seems like he just can't get anything done. They're worse off than they were twenty years ago, and all they've had is a living."

"I know," Leon agreed. His eyes were sorrowful. "I remember coming home from the Philippines, how green and fine Marshall's Meadows looked to me when I drove up the road. Father always kept them cleared up, and the hay was always stout. Last time I was down, it struck me. the change there was. The alders had come in from the Pond lot side, five or six rod of thick growth of them; and they're sprinkled all over the Meadows, little bunches here and there. And the grass is thin, not hardly worth the cutting. You can haul all one man will cut in half a day to the barn in one load pretty near. It made me sick to look at it."

"Caleb can't seem to get any help," Dora confessed. "Lately, he's sold the hay off, you know."

"Just as if it was an abandoned farm," Leon commented unhappily. "Oh, I'm not blaming Caleb," he explained. "I know he's done the best he could. But it needs more than he knows how to do." He looked at his sister with a sudden, acute glance. "Dora, what are they going to do?" he asked.

"Do? What do you mean?"

"You know as well as me," he insisted. "They're living off the land, selling it off or selling the stuff off of it. I'd hate like time to see the old place go; but Caleb and Esther—why they're getting old. They won't be able to get along much longer."

Dora hesitated. "They're talking about selling the Meadows," she confessed.

Leon stared at her for an instant in stark incredulity. "The Meadows?" he repeated. "After the way Father worked to pay for them, and the way he loved them." He was silent for an instant. "I'd hate mightily to see that," he protested.

"I guess we all would," Dora agreed.

"Are they really talking about it?" he asked.

"Yes. Yes, Esther told me so."

Jennie saw the trouble in his face and came and touched his hand. "I didn't know they were that bad off," he murmured slowly. "I didn't know things were that bad."

He became silent; after a little wandered out of doors alone, and Sam followed and sat near his father, sharing the older man's trouble and willing to postpone the hour when he must answer his mother's questions about Annie Maclure. They were still there when Arthur and the children returned.

## V

In Fraternity, July is the appointed season for haying. Most of the farmers begin the process about the Fourth. They work against the difficulties to be expected in such a locality. It is al-

most impossible to hire help, so that men trade a day's work with each other. In many of the smaller meadows the mowing must be done in part by hand; there are so many corners into which it is impossible to maneuver a machine. Little by little the hay is cut and sweated and spread and dried and mowed away. The great barns, yawning and empty when the task is begun, slowly fill. A barn in Fraternity is almost all mow. There may be a tie-up for the cows and a stall or two for horses along one side; at one end of the other side perhaps a chicken pen. But for the rest, from the floor to the nest-crusted beams overhead, the hay is packed and piled.

This year haying got under way as usual. Caleb could cut as much as he needed for the two or three head of stock in the big Dillard barn from meadows on the home place; but he could not do the work alone, and he could not afford to hire help. Esther always objected to his trading labor with other farmers. This year he appealed to Fergus Weir.

Fergus had, in the last two or three months, aged perceptibly. The man, Caleb thought with a dull surprise, seemed to be collapsing almost before his eyes; he had been minded once or twice to write and warn Leon. But young Sam was with Fergus and took care of him as well as a boy might; and Caleb knew Leon must be busy at this season. So he forbore to write.

He went to see Fergus one late afternoon early in July and found him engaged with Sam in mowing a load of hay. Fergus on the load adjusted the hay-fork; and Caleb could hear him pant with

the effort. The well-trained horse at a word of command walked out through the barn door drawing on the rope which lifted the filled fork to Sam, waiting overhead. Sam thus had the harder task of stowing the hay; nevertheless, Fergus was visibly in distress, and Caleb persuaded him to come down and lead the horse while Caleb took his place on the load.

When they were done, Caleb asked if there was more to come in; and Fergus shook his head. "This is the last of it, for tonight," he said. They stood in the wide barn door, where a cool breeze sucked in from the shaded eastern end of the structure; and Caleb asked if it might be possible for him to get young Sam to help with his hay for a day or two, and pay with his own services for the services of the boy.

Fergus, mopping his forehead and coughing the dust and chaff out of his throat, considered. "I've got two-three days more of hard work to do," he explained. "And I don't seem to be able to get as much done as I did. It kind of hurts me in here, to swing a fork, sometimes." He rubbed his side thoughtfully. "But we aim to be neighborly with you, Caleb. How much you going to cut this year?"

Caleb's program was a meager one; Fergus grimaced when he heard it. "Ain't you cutting the Meadows?" he asked.

"I'm selling the hay off of there to Lee Motley," Caleb explained. "That is, I figure to. We don't need it."

Fergus shook his head. "Seems like a shame," he commented. But he agreed that young Sam

would be able to help Caleb a little. "He can come over for an hour just before noontime, right along," he suggested. "And then right after dinner for a spell. And towards night he can help you mow it. We've got the work here by the tail. Another two-three days."

So Sam did come to help Caleb; and Caleb in turn helped Sam and Fergus. He thought it necessary to explain the arrangement to Esther. "Fergus is kind of poorly," he told her. "I can do him some good; and I couldn't get along without Sam unless I hired somebody. You better just put up a lunch for me, and him and me will eat up in the field."

She heard him through, but negatived this last suggestion. "It's a nuisance and a bother," she said, in her even tones so full of finality. "You fetch the boy to the house and eat here."

Caleb was surprised; but he kept his eyes on his plate—they were at supper—and made no comment. After a little Esther said, as though she would justify herself: "I see him going by here in the evening sometimes, gadding. He goes to see that little Annie Maclure. He needs somebody to look out for him and tell him what to do."

"Sam's a good boy," Caleb said mildly.

"He might be if he'd been raised right," Esther amended. She looked toward her brother with some hesitation. "I noticed he looked something like father's boy pictures," she said at last. "Did you notice that?"

Caleb had not noticed it; but he was so gratified at Esther's surprising complaisance that he was

unwilling to contradict her. "Yes," he agreed. "Yes, I can see it in him."

So, three or four times, Sam had lunch in the kitchen with Caleb and Esther. Appetite overrode any constraint he may have felt; he ate with a lusty heartiness. Caleb and Esther were accustomed to eat but little; and at Sam's first performance Esther was kept scurrying for fresh bread and butter to keep him supplied. The next day she was prepared for him, with a bounteous repast; and Caleb caught her smiling with satisfaction as she watched the gusto with which Sam attacked it. She said to Caleb that night: "It's a pleasure to see a body fancy his victuals so."

She made no open move to reclaim him from the clutches of Annie Maclure; but one day at noon she said: "Sam, any time you're lonesome in the evening, we'd like if you came over."

Sam said gravely that he would. He was eighteen, and doing a man's work, and felt himself mature. To his eyes there was nothing astonishing in Esther's invitation. He knew her bitter feeling toward his father; but he had a youthful tolerance and the fact that she liked him did not surprise him. He had found that most people liked him. He was full of the knowledge, for example, that Annie Maclure seemed to like him as much as he liked her, which was a very great deal. He had kissed her the night before.

Sam met Annie at that first dance in the hall above Will Bissell's store. Young Andy Wattles, who clerked for Will, suggested Sam's coming to the dance. The two boys were about of an age, and they liked one another. Annie—there were

a number of Maclures in Fraternity, but her father was Dave Maclure, who lived toward the head of the Pond—had come with her older sister. Andy knew the sisters, and he brought Annie and Sam together. A shy friendship developed between them that night; it was to persist and grow. There was a vigorous quality in Sam which set him apart from the other boys of the village; it was as though he discovered a keener pleasure in the mere fact that he was alive, and young. Annie found him different; she remembered him and he remembered her.

Old Fergus, though he worked vigorously through the day, was apt to doze off to sleep in his chair beside the kitchen table soon after supper. This did not seem to Sam the right way to spend an evening, he fell into the habit of taking advantage of his grandfather's drowsiness to go about his own affairs. The social life of the village was not strenuous; there were few occasions to bring him and Annie together so long as snow and cold kept most people indoors. But with the coming of spring, this was changed. There was a hall in an open meadow in North Fraternity which served as a skating rink, and where in the evening dances were sometimes held. There were also occasional dances in the grange hall. In addition, Sam discovered that Annie went to church every Sunday, and that there was a social side of the church life. He became a regular attendant, and one day Mrs. Maclure asked him home to Sunday dinner. Afterwards he took Annie and her sister to row upon the pond. The two girls, in stiff white dresses, sat side by side in the stern;

Sam at the oars faced them. Their talk was for the most part slow and restrained, for restraint is a habit of life in Fraternity; but Sam had an impish wit about him and at times he brought them both to the point of uncontrollable mirth, which took the form of smothered giggles stifled as quickly as might be. He went home that afternoon feeling that he had done himself credit.

His opportunities to be alone with Annie were very few. She was usually either with her sister or her mother. Fraternity is old fashioned; there was one girl in town who had bobbed her hair and wore a pair of bloomers made out of one of her father's old blue flannel shirts, but she was frowned upon. Annie was demure and awkward and a little shy; but she was at that ripening age when young girls are like sensitive plants reaching out for kindness and affection. Sam was always gentle with her; and her eyes when she looked at him were apt to be deep and warm.

One Sunday when he went home with them to dinner Mrs. Maclure and Annie's sister happened to be busy elsewhere, and Annie and Sam were left alone on the porch outside the kitchen door. As soon as they realized they were alone, both became thoroughly ill at ease. Annie smoothed her dress over her knees and sat with her feet very close together and her eyes turned away from him. Sam felt upon himself the duty of speech, yet could think of nothing worth saying. He spoke of the weather, reported to her the condition of Fergus' garden, asked if she had had a good time at the dance the night before. Before

she could answer, Mrs. Maclure came out to sit down in the cool and Sam was immensely relieved.

One day Andy Wattles suggested that they take the two sisters to the next dance together; and Sam agreed. Fergus had an old two-seated buckboard in the carriage shed, and Sam at odd moments found time to grease the wheels, clean the seat, and cover the whole with varnish. When they called for the girls, Annie climbed into the rear seat with her sister, and Sam and Andy perforce sat together in front. This relieved the occasion of any constraint they might otherwise have felt; they talked and laughed cheerfully enough during the long drive to North Fraternity. At the dance Sam was unnaturally noisy; his voice was louder than usual and his eyes shone. But when they drove homeward in the light of a waning moon, silence fell upon them all again. They said good night in the barnyard, with Mrs. Maclure calling from the dark kitchen: "Is that you, girls?" Sam and Annie were a little apart from the others, and Annie giggled and whispered:

"Her hair's in curl papers. That's why she don't light a lamp and ask you in."

They both laughed at that as though it were a tremendous joke. Then Annie held out her hand and Sam shook it gingerly, and he and Andy drove away, rather relieved than otherwise.

The four had come that evening to something like an arrangement for a rendezvous. Annie had confessed that she and her sister, on Sunday afternoons, sometimes walked along the shore of the Pond to a little sandy beach where there was

a spring, and where they liked to take off their shoes and stockings and go in wading. Sam said he and Andy were expecting to go fishing in the Pond the next Sunday, and asked where the beach was, and she told him. On the way home, he confided this to Andy; and the following Sunday, with some misgivings, the two boys rowed up the Pond to the appointed spot. There was no one on the beach when they arrived; they anchored in the cove and fished for a while and caught a few white perch before Annie and her sister appeared. Then they rowed ashore. The two girls stayed for almost an hour. There was no disposition to draw apart in couples; they all felt safer in company. When the girls decided they must go, Andy offered them the perch, but both shook their heads.

"Ma would know we'd seen somebody, if we took them home," Annie's sister said.

The clandestine aspect this gave their encounter lent it more glamour than it deserved. Sam and Andy went home with their heads in the air.

It was about a week later, toward mid-July, that there was an ice cream supper at the church in the village. The two boys invited Annie and her sister. Paper lanterns hanging in the trees lighted an expanse of sod beside the edifice, where long tables were spread. The night was dark, and outside the circle of radiance there was a sheltering gloom. Sam, at Annie's side, saw one couple and another withdraw into this gloom; and in the end he drew Annie away from the tables and they found themselves in a world full of whispering shadows. The road past the church led toward

Annie's home; they wandered that way and the warm night enfolded them. By and by Sam said:

"Let's walk home."

Annie shook her head. "They'll be looking for us."

"I'll go back and tell Andy," Sam offered. She was reluctant. "Why not?" he urged. And added: "Oh, please do."

"I can't," Annie insisted. "I have to wait for them."

"You sit down and wait here till I go back and tell them."

"They'd be mad."

Shivering at his own great daring, he took her by the arm, adding a physical urgency to his pleadings. "It's only a little ways," he argued. "And it's time to be going home, anyway. They'll catch up with us."

She tried to push his hand off her arm; her fingers touched his and they tussled together, laughingly. Sam put his arm around her, and she looked up at him in the darkness with a question and a fear in her deep eyes. He was suddenly rigid, nor did she stir in the circle of his arms. Then he said slowly: "I'll bet they'd like to drive home alone, anyway."

She uttered some low sound, meaningless to any other ears. A whippoorwill in the hard wood growth above them began his maddening call. In the night it was like a pulse beating. Sam kissed her.

He had kissed his mother before this, and Dora, and even Esther; but those kisses were cool and unperturbed. Annie's kiss was warm and shy.

Her lips were parted; he felt, faintly, her teeth against his lips, and felt her lungs fill in a little gasp like the inhalation of one suddenly dashed with cold water. When she could speak, she said again:

"We'll have to wait for them, Sam. We better go back, now."

He was unaccountably docile, no longer opposed her. They walked black toward the church. But Annie let her fingers rest in his arm; and Sam trod on air.

## VI

On a night in mid-August, Esther was awakened by a clamoring at the kitchen door, just under her window. Someone was knocking there, and calling insistently: "Aunt Esther! Aunt Esther!" And again: "Uncle Caleb! Uncle Caleb!" She woke easily, for her sleep was always light; and she understood at once that the caller was Sam. For an instant she was fearfully afraid; it was not till afterward that she analyzed this emotion and was surprised to discover that she had been alarmed for Sam's sake. Esther had not guessed that she was fond of Sam.

She rose and, modesty overruling her haste, drew about her shoulders her thin dressing-gown, then crossed to the window. The screen prevented her putting out her head; but she called softly: "Who is it? What's the matter, Sam?"

The boy cried: "Grandpa's sick. I guess he's dying. I got to get someone to come."

Esther was still for an instant; then: "I'll be right down," she said. Withdrawing from the

window, she lighted her lamp and went through into the black hall past Caleb's door and wakened him. Caleb was sometimes an astonishingly sound sleeper. When he answered her knock, she told him: "Fergus Weir's sick. Sam's come for help. You better get up."

He said he would, and she went downstairs and admitted Sam to the kitchen. The boy was white with fear; and she saw that he was dressed in his best clothes. "Caleb'll be right down," she told him reassuringly. "What's the matter with Fergus?"

"I don't know," Sam confessed. "I got home and he had fallen out of his chair on the floor and was just lying there."

"Got home?" She caught at the phrase. "Why Sam, what time is it? Where had you been?"

"It's just past midnight," he told her. "I'd been to a dance, and when I got home Grandpa was lying there. I got him over on his back and onto the couch in the kitchen; but I couldn't do anything with him. He just lies there. So I came for you."

She peered through the open kitchen door. "Have you got the team there? You better go get Dr. Crapo, and get Caleb here on your way back."

Sam shook his head. "I got to go take care of Grandpa. Let Caleb fetch the doctor. Can't you come over with me, Aunt Esther?"

Esther had never been in Fergus Weir's house, had never thought to go there; but she could not meet Sam's appeal with any word of this. "I'm not dressed, Sam," she protested.

"You're dressed enough. I tell you Grandpa's dying," he cried; and she was ashamed of herself.

"I'll just get a coat on," she promised. Caleb came downstairs with sleepy eyes before she was ready; they told him the emergency, and he hurried to the barn to hitch up and fetch the doctor. Sam and Esther drove away, and Sam whipped the horse to a gallop along the road past the Mason place, and around over the ridge to Fergus Weir's farm. As they drew into the barnyard, Esther saw a light in the kitchen window. Sam jumped out first, cramped the wheel so that she might alight, and then ran ahead of her into the kitchen.

They found Fergus conscious, and Sam was infinitely relieved. The old man could only say he thought he must have gone to sleep. He said he had been surprised to waken on the couch, and his side hurt a little. Esther took command, while Sam waited helplessly in the background, the color returning to his cheeks. Esther made Fergus lie still, and spoke polite reassurance; and Fergus regretted that Sam had disturbed them.

"I was scared," Sam confessed, grinning.

"Fiddle," said Fergus. "What's the sense of being scared over an old man like me, Sam?" There was a wistful joviality in his tone; and Esther was surprised to see how old and how small he seemed. She had always thought of Fergus—in spite of the evidence of her own eyes to the contrary—as a large, domineering man.

Caleb came with Dr. Crapo; and the physician listened to their stories and talked with Fergus and poured a dozen little pills into the hollow of

his hand and gave them to Sam. "You see that he gets one of these, next time," he directed.

"I'm not sick, Doctor," Fergus protested. "Don't you go to make an invalid out of me."

"I don't aim to," Dr. Crapo agreed. "You're as well as a man of your age has any right to be. But you've got to take care of yourself."

He and Caleb had come in his automobile; and he took Caleb and Esther back to the Dillard place in that conveyance. Before leaving them he said soberly: "Fergus is in bad shape. His heart is going back on him. He ought to have somebody to take care of him besides that boy."

Esther nodded. "We'll have to arrange something," she assented, and when Dr. Crapo was gone she said to Caleb: "I expect you'd better write to Leon in the morning."

"I expect so," Caleb agreed. Neither of them realized that this was the first time Esther had spoken her brother's name for twenty years.

"You better tell him what Sam is doing, too," Esther added; and Caleb asked:

"What's he doing?"

"Out till all hours with that Maclure girl," Esther told him.

"What harm?" Caleb protested. "She's a nice little girl."

"They'll be getting married," Esther predicted, "the first thing a body knows."

Caleb looked at her, and was silent for a moment, and then said slowly: "Well, young folks are getting married all the time."

"If you don't write to him I will," Esther threatened.

"I ain't going to bother Leon," Caleb said stubbornly. "But I'll write him about Fergus, of course."

He kept his word. He wrote to Leon next day; but first he walked over to see how Fergus did. Fergus was better; confessed to him that he had had such spells before and made no talk about them. His manner had in it a curious submissiveness, as though he had heard a summons and meant to obey. Caleb, looking backward afterward, remembered that Fergus had been like that since the death of his wife. Returning to the Dillard place, he wrote his brother at length and said someone ought to come to take care of Fergus. On the third day afterward, Jennie arrived. Fergus and his daughter and his grandson had four happy days together, and then one morning when Jennie went to her father's room she found the old man—who always woke so early—still asleep. From that sleep he did not awaken.

The late summer lull in the work on the farms was just beginning. Leon's hay was all cut; he was able to come to the funeral and to stay several days. Caleb went to the services; and the two brothers had opportunity to discuss the situation together. Leon confessed himself uncertain what to do. "The place here is in such good shape it would be a shame to sell," he told Caleb. "And I hate to sell anyway. I've always figured as long as Fergus owned the Howe place it would still be coming back to me some day. It's part of Father's land. I wouldn't want to sell it now."

"I'd hate to see it go," Caleb agreed.

"You wouldn't want to rent it off of us, would you?" Leon suggested, and Caleb shook his head wearily.

"I've got all I can handle," he confessed. "Esther and I have about come to the point of selling off Marshall's Meadows as it is."

Leon accepted this in grave silence, since there was nothing he could say. "I don't feel like renting to anyone else," he explained. "They'd just keep taking out and never putting anything back in, and in ten years the land would be all gone back."

"That's so," Caleb assented. "Rent a farm's the best way there is to ruin it."

"I expect I'll let Sam see if he can't manage, till fall," Leon said at last. "I kind of figured he'd go to Maine then. He wants to go to college."

"It'd be good for him," Caleb agreed. "Yes, it would do him good. But he likes, here. He's told me so."

Jennie was unshaken by her father's death. She accepted it as a part of the great, wholesome cycle of life whose pulse beat in her. "I never could see that death was any worse than being born," she told Leon one night after they were abed. "I suppose I ought to cry and take on; but somehow I know Pa's all right. He's just started in to work a new farm; that's all."

A few days after the funeral, they went home, leaving Sam and young Fergus, who was fifteen years old and big enough to do a lot of work, to care for the place through the summer. "I'll come in the fall or send someone to help with the

apples," Leon told his son. "You keep her going till then."

Esther had not attended the funeral services; Leon did not see his sister at all. But when matters had settled back to routine again Caleb asked her: "Did you write to Leon about Sam and the girl?"

Esther shook her head. "I thought I'd wait till he had this all off his mind."

"I don't see what you bother him for. They're doing no harm."

"Somebody's got to," Esther insisted. "I'm not going to see that boy get started wrong, and him so young."

"Leon's going to send him to college."

"The more reason to look out for him now," Esther remarked.

But she delayed writing to Leon. Last sparks of her old fierce pride restrained her. So Fergus went to his rest, and Sam and young Fergus administered his acres, and Leon and Jennie returned to their farm, and Caleb and Esther settled into their old and dusty ways again.

## VII

Young Mahlon Hull and Mary Dillard were married in June; but Mahlon was too busy to leave the farm at that time. The summer drew along; Mary was away from home for two days when she went to Fergus' funeral; returned in a warm tempest of happiness at being home again. In August, when the hay was in, Mahlon hired two carpenters and worked with them on the ad-

dition to his house, which would give Mary and himself separate quarters of their own. His mother and sister and Mary worked together putting up vegetables from the garden and preserving the berries in their seasons, strawberries and raspberries and blueberries as each ripened and matured. About the first of September, Mahlon decided that he and Mary could be away for ten days before time to pick the Gravensteins, so they drove to East Harbor and took boat for Boston and were like children together. Returning, they stayed a day or two in East Harbor with Dora and Arthur Tuck.

Dora and Arthur, watching the happiness of the two young people, harked back ten years to the time of their own wedding, and remembered the sweetest hours of the years that had gone before. Dora told Mary about the afternoon when she and Arthur took their first drive together; she told about her trip to Bangor when Arthur went up on the boat with her and returned with her and they pretended, each alone and without speaking their thoughts aloud, that they were on their wedding journey; and she told the girl how she and Arthur used to meet in the fringe of the Bartlett Wood. . . .

Till Mary threw her arms about her aunt's neck and cried: "You two old dears. Weren't you sweet. But why didn't you get married then, long before you did?"

Dora was too loyal to blame Esther. "I expect it was because we didn't know our own minds, Mary," she confessed wistfully. "I expect we were both a little afraid."

"Father and Mother weren't afraid," Mary said proudly. "When they knew they loved each other, they got married right away."

Dora nodded. "I remember," she said softly. "I remember."

"Mother told me about it," Mary explained. "She said Father was so awfully bashful, and she had to do it all. I had to, with Mahlon. I guess most men are that way, aren't they?"

"I expect they are, dear," Dora agreed.

Mary had her own secret to tell Dora; and Dora wept over her at the telling, but happily, so that Mary should not be alarmed. When the young people drove away at last, Dora was sorry to see them go; and there was something like envy in her heart; but she would not let Arthur see.

Next day when they went out to Fraternity to have Sunday dinner with Esther and Caleb, Dora told Esther about Mary's visit. Told her also that Mary would have a baby in April; and Esther, rocking rigidly in her little chair, faintly sniffed with her ancient disapproval. But Dora cried:

"Now Esther Dillard, you stop that. You're old enough to know better. The idea! And you almost a great-aunt already."

"I only meant Mary must still be such a child," Esther explained almost humbly before her sister's vehemence.

"She's a lovely little woman," Dora cried; "And she'll make a beautiful mother." Suddenly and to her own surprise found tears in her eyes and wailed: "Oh, Esther, aren't you ever going to stop trying to spoil things for people?" She

was penitent a moment later; for she saw the deep grief that sprang into Esther's eyes, and Esther humbled herself, and said wistfully:

"I expect I've been wrong, Dora. I expect you'll always hate me." So that Dora could only hold her sister's small figure in her arms. Holding her thus, she perceived how gray Esther's hair was become, and realized that they were both growing old; and they clung together as though to find defense in this alliance against the world.

Caleb and Arthur had gone down across the road that morning to look at Marshall's Meadows. They wandered to and fro, along the brook that wound there, and across the low knolls where the hay was so thin it scarcely caught the dew, and through the lower lands where the alders were springing up, hungry to possess the soil. After a while they sat down beside a bend in the brook where there was a little backwater; and they watched the slow movement of the drift in the eddy there in silence. Caleb said at last:

"I wanted you to see what shape the meadows are in, Arthur."

"The hay don't pay for cutting, does it," Arthur remarked.

"Lee Motley wouldn't buy it this year," Caleb told him. "He said he couldn't make anything on it. I can't blame him. I suppose I might have cut the best of it myself, but it took all my time getting in what I needed; and then it had gone by."

"You can't work the whole farm without help," Arthur conceded uncertainly.

They sat for a while longer, then rose as though

reluctantly and walked back to the house. Esther and Dora had dinner ready; and while they ate they spoke of other things. After dinner Sam stopped to see them for a minute. He said young Fergus was going to walk over after a while. Esther asked where he was going, and he told her he was going up the Pond with Andy Wattles. Dora, watching her sister, saw Esther's lips stiffen, and when Sam drove away, Esther said: "I believe they meet those Maclure girls up there."

Dora laughed chidingly. "Now Esther! Sam's just a boy. Boys and girls are bound to run together."

"Sam's too nice for her," Esther insisted, and Dora replied:

"You'll find he'll be the one to decide that. Now Esther, you leave Sam alone." She constrained her sister to a grudging silence.

Toward mid-afternoon they all gathered beside the house in the orchard to sit and talk, the men smoking, the women rocking with idle hands to mark their observance of the Sabbath. After a while and imperceptibly the talk drifted to the Meadows down across the road. Caleb told Dora: "We were down there this morning. They'll be all grown up to alders in another ten years. Alders and popple and birch." His tone was curiously impersonal, as though he spoke of a matter with which he had no concern.

Dora did not answer at once; so many things always went unsaid between them. They approached their ends by indirection; their words were apt to be merely the reiteration of a conclu-

sion toward which they were reaching out. It was often as though they argued with themselves. "Leon noticed that," Dora said at last. "He said he could see such a change since he went away."

"The thing to do," Caleb explained, as though they did not know as well as he, "would be to put in potatoes for a year, and then beans for a year, and then re-seed the land. Then you could cut good hay down there for six or eight or maybe ten years."

"But you probably couldn't get anyone to cut it," Arthur reminded them.

"That's right," Caleb agreed wearily.

"Caleb's got all he can do here at home," Esther explained. They had always differentiated between the home farm and later additions, in their talk together.

"You've really got all you need, right here," Dora agreed.

"I've been selling the hay off, lately," Caleb said. "But Lee Motley wouldn't buy it this year. He said it wouldn't pay him."

Their faces were grave and impassive. Only a close observer could have discovered the grief which underlaid all their thought and all their words. Esther, her hands clasped across her waist in the precise fashion which was her habit, rocked gently to and fro. Dora's greater weight had sunk her rockers into the soft turf so that she sat motionless; her muscles strained a little now and then as she sought to set the chair rocking again. Caleb and Arthur sat straight, on straight chairs, the legs sunk into the sod.

"With what we can do here at home," Esther explained at length, "we don't need so very much cash money to get along."

"Even when I was here," Dora assented, "we didn't need much."

"I suppose we ought to keep chickens," Esther conceded, "but I can't bear them cackling around. And they dirty things so."

"It don't pay to keep cows, either," Caleb added. "Butter don't hardly pay for making it, half the time."

"The apples are about all we can count on, to sell," Esther resumed. "Without cows, we don't have milk for pigs. You can't do much with pigs without you have milk. They get rheumatism, and they don't put on weight hardly at all. You'd be surprised."

It was Arthur—the matter was not so close to him as it was to them—who at length put their thought into words. "It does look as though the thing to do was to sell the Meadows," he suggested.

They considered that in silence. "I declare I don't know what Father would say," Esther confessed.

Dora began to argue with her. "He'd want you to do what was best," she said.

"It's hard to know," Esther explained.

"I feel like it was my fault," Caleb said slowly. "I ought to be able to keep things going better."

"I expect you could get a good price for them," Dora urged. "I expect there are lots of people that would like to buy them."

"Caleb's talked to some," Esther said ruefully.

"Lee Motley said he'd pay us a fair price. There's no one else. I suppose we might find somebody."

"It wouldn't take much," Dora urged. "You could put it in the bank and the interest would be enough to keep you going, with the apples. Even if it was only a hundred dollars a year."

"It would be about a hundred and twenty, I guess," Caleb told them. Then his eyes fell as though he were ashamed to let them know that his calculations had gone so far.

"I declare," Dora exclaimed in brighter tones, "that would be nice for you. I should think you'd do it, Esther."

"We've had to think about it," Esther conceded.

Arthur moved uneasily. "Probably I could find somebody to lend, if you wanted to mortgage," he said.

But they all shook their heads at that; and Esther replied gently: "You're so good, Arthur. We know you'd do anything. But we've got to manage by ourselves. Only I thought Dora had a right to help us decide."

"It's for you to do what you think best," Dora said soberly. "You know that, Esther."

"Well, you're a Dillard as much as we are, Dora." Esther's voice was very low.

They let the matter rest in this inconclusive fashion. An outsider, listening, might have supposed that nothing had been decided, but these three understood each other; and Esther and Caleb knew that Dora had consented to the sale, and Dora knew they would sell.

When she and Arthur started home that evening, the Meadows lay to their left and below them, and Dora's eyes rested on them as though she would never see these lands again. "I remember how Father used to like to just sit and look at them," she said softly.

"You can still look at them," Arthur told her, in a sensible tone. But Dora shook her head.

"It won't be the same," she said. Her eyes were full of tears.

### VIII

Early in October, the sale of the Meadows was consummated. Lee Motley was the buyer. Lee had offered, more than once before, to put a price on the lands, but they had always put him off. Esther now thought that if they went to him directly, he would be inclined to take advantage of their eagerness to sell; she wished to induce him to reopen the matter of his own accord. So Arthur met Eben Hobbs in East Harbor one day and told him that Caleb and Esther had had an offer for the Meadows and were thinking of taking it; and as Arthur expected, the news spread in Fraternity. Eben told Will Bissell and Jim Saladine; Andy Wattles heard them talking and repeated the rumor to Gay Hunt. Will Belter got it from Gay and took it to the man he thought would be most interested; for Will was by nature a gossip. He told Lee Motley and thus served Esther's end, for Lee at once drove over to the Dillard place.

The price at which they came to an agreement was neither so high as Esther and Caleb had ex-

pected nor so low as they had feared; but Esther, who handled the negotiations, had too much Dillard pride to bargain. "If we're going to sell, we'll sell," she told Caleb. "But I won't go haggling with any man." So Lee drew up a rough agreement, which they all signed. Motley knew, as all the village knew, how the Dillards clung to their lands; he was acutely uncomfortable throughout the interview, and once he had an uncertain fear that Esther was going to weep. He escaped with a distinct sensation of relief; and when he was gone, Esther and Caleb sat in silence for a long hour before they rose and went to bed. Each felt, in that hour, as though age had come upon them; they knew at last that they were old. And Esther, in her troubled sleep, dreamed of her father and was afraid because of the expression which sat upon his countenance. He had bought the Meadows when she was a girl; she had lost them in her old age, and she blamed herself bitterly.

A few days after the bargain they drove to East Harbor to meet Motley in Arthur Tuck's office there and complete the transaction. Dora had to sign a formal relinquishment of any claim she may have had upon the lands; Esther and Caleb executed the deed under Arthur's direction; and Motley made payment, a part in cash, a part by check, and the balance in the form of a note which Arthur undertook to discount at the bank. His obligations thus satisfied, Motley was glad to escape; he told Will Bissell that night that the group had looked like mourners at a funeral. "Kind of pitiful, it was," he said.

Will nodded. "But Caleb'll get along better now," he commented. "He had too much on his hands."

Caleb and Esther had decided that Arthur should invest the purchase price and pay them the returns on this investment. "I declare," Esther said, when Motley was gone, "I feel like a load was off my shoulders already. Things are bound to be easier now. We'll have more money coming in than the hay would bring."

"And the money will come in regular," Dora reminded her. "That's more than the hay money did in a bad year."

Esther was curiously light-hearted; she laughed a little, and she bent and kissed Caleb's cheek where he sat in stunned and stolid fashion in a chair. "Poor old Caleb has worked so mighty hard," she exclaimed.

Dora had invited them to stay for supper and go in the evening to the moving pictures, before driving back to Fraternity; and Esther had decided to stay. Esther and Caleb and Dora left Arthur at his office, where he still had work to do, and walked home together. When they arrived there, Esther was exhilarated and unusually talkative; but Caleb, relaxing in a chair, sat like an old man, with head bowed down. When he spoke at last it was in answer to a question from Dora.

"Why, I was just thinking," he explained, "that there never was a time since our great-grandfather came to this country when the Dillards owned as little land."

That silenced the sisters for a moment, till

Esther protested defensively: "But we've got all we want."

Caleb nodded. "Yes. Yes. There's not many Dillards left of us now. It don't need much to take care of us."

Dora cried: "But Caleb, Esther, you're forgetting Leon. You're not counting Leon. Land of mercy, but there'll always be Dillards I'm thinking, with those four boys of his coming along. Not counting the two girls besides."

"Oh, there are Dillards, certain," Caleb agreed. "But they've moved away, just the way Leon moved away. There's only the two of us left in Fraternity now. Esther and me. And there've been Dillards there for better than a hundred years, in the same house all the time."

They knew that what he said was true; it could not be denied. Nor in the end could they find any comfort, nor escape the fact that the Dillard blood was almost gone from Fraternity; that the Dillard place was no more than a starved and ruined farm, fit only to be abandoned. Caleb summarized it in a phrase. "Take it in twenty years from now," he predicted, "and there won't be anybody around here that ever heard the name."

After that the sisters did not feel like talking any more. When Arthur came home, spite of his best efforts, supper was a silent meal. His attempts at cheerful conversation fell flat and stale. A shadow hung above them all.

They went to the moving pictures in a perfunctory way, because they had planned to do so; but Esther made Caleb harness up so that they could start for home immediately afterward. They

were a little late in arriving at the theater; the lights had been extinguished and a news reel was being shown upon the screen. Caleb and Esther, unused to such an adventure, stumbled through the darkness behind Arthur and Dora and fumbled their way into their seats. Then for a little while gave attention to the screen.

After the news reel, which Esther found absorbing, came a comedy which puzzled her, and then the feature picture of the evening. The central figure in this picture was a young girl with a twitchy face; the camera displayed her countenance, enormously magnified, so that the audience could fairly see the churning of her tear ducts, could watch the muscular contractions by which she forced the tears to come. This girl had a father who in the most innocent manner found himself accused of murder and who insanely assumed that he would be convicted and hung, and so fled—the transition was abrupt—to a South Sea island where he spent most of his time teaching his daughter to swim in a scanty bathing suit. There was another man with a lowering visage, a skilled detective according to the subtitles, who nevertheless accepted the guilt of the girl's father without question and tracked him half-way around the world. Esther was sufficiently intelligent so that this panorama of inhuman events palled upon her quickly; her eyes wandered from the screen and she began to scrutinize her neighbors, dimly seen in the light reflected from the pictures. Faces behind her she could see, but to turn around made her feel conspicuous; she recognized an occasional countenance on either side, saw half a dozen Fra-

ternity folk in the audience and wondered whether they came often. The heads of the people in front of her were in flat silhouette; but eventually Esther's attention was attracted by four of these heads. Two young men and two girls sat together; and Esther, after a moment's scrutiny, was satisfied that in each case the girl was leaning against her companion's shoulder. Esther had a quick instinct in such matters; she guessed that they were holding hands, and her spine stiffened in disapproval. Then one of the girls whispered to the boy beside her, and he bent to reply, and their cheeks touched in the darkness.

Esther recognized the boy as Sam!

The subsequent twenty minutes while the film continued to unroll was for Esther full of inward turmoil. If Sam was here with a girl, the girl was undoubtedly Annie Maclure; and Esther felt that all her suspicions were by this fact confirmed. Give her credit for honesty. She found no satisfaction in this discovery, only profound and disturbed grief. She was quite sure that Sam had chosen a path that could lead only to destruction; and she was tormented with doubt as to what her own course should now be. When at length the lights flared on, Dora leaned over and said:

"We'll sit through and see the first of it."

But Esther had seen Sam and his companions rise and move down the aisle; she shook her head at Dora, and rose to speak to her nephew. "Sam!" she said, in her low voice. He did not at first hear her or see her. She repeated his name, more loudly. This time he did hear, and his eyes met

hers. He smiled with frank delight, and lifted his hand and called to her:

"Hello, Aunt Esther!"

She moved through the seats toward the aisle and he waited for her. "I didn't know you ever came to town, Sam," she said quietly.

"This is the first time," Sam replied. He introduced his companions. "This is Annie Maclure. You've heard me talk about her. And I guess you know Andy. And this is Annie's sister."

Esther, controlling herself, managed to smile in acknowledgment. "Are you going right home?" she asked.

Sam nodded. "As soon as we get an ice cream soda." He greeted the others, behind her. "Hello, Uncle Caleb. Hello, Aunt Dora." Then to Esther again: "Have you got your team? We could crowd you in."

"Did you drive in?" Esther asked.

"Yes, in the old buckboard."

Esther hesitated. "We've our team," she said at last. "I just thought you might want to be carried home. We've an extra seat." They were drifting apart. "Come and see us soon, Sam," she invited. Sam nodded as he disappeared in the crowd that moved down the aisle toward the door. Esther said to Dora, with stiff lips:

"Well!"

But thereafter she kept silence; a silence which Dora felt was ominous, as she and Arthur said good-by to Esther and Caleb and saw them start up the hill past the Post Office before turning along Main Street toward their own home. Then Dora said to Arthur:

"I'm afraid Esther's going to make it hard for Sam."

Arthur assented. "That's Esther's way," he agreed, without rancor.

At the top of the hill, just out of town, Esther made Caleb turn into a side road and wheel the horse around and wait. "I'm not going to have those children out alone at this time of night," she explained. "We'll wait till they pass and then keep along behind them."

Caleb said mildly: "They won't thank you!" But Esther was not to be moved.

"Leon will," she retorted. "And Mrs. Maclure, if she has any sense at all. I'm going to write to Leon tonight. It's time he knew what was going on."

Caleb made no further protest. He was weighed down by the events of the day, the final and irrevocable loss of the broad meadows, his father had loved; felt himself personally guilty of a breach of trust. He had no mind to concern himself with Sam's affairs. But Esther, alert and inexorable, directed him; and when by and by the buckboard passed, she clucked to the horse and they followed a few rods behind. Followed past the Dillard place to the village, followed till they saw the buckboard turn into the road that led up the Pond toward the Maclure farm. Only then did Esther consent that he turn back.

When he came in from stabling the horse, he found his sister already busy with pen and paper at the kitchen table.

## IX

During the latter part of the summer, Leon had come often to the farm which had belonged to Fergus Weir, where Sam and Fergus Dillard now dwelt in all the healthy disorder native to boys who hold food more important than clean dishes. Once or twice Jennie drove down with him, to clean up the kitchen and put fresh linen on the beds, and give the boys a flying start at decency again. She scolded them lovingly; and they accepted her reproaches with the good-natured tolerance youth has for the foibles of age, though it was faintly ridiculous to call Jennie old. She was in her fortieth year, and Leon thought her more beautiful than she had ever been. Sometimes in the late afternoon they walked out over the farm and revisited the scenes of their first encounters, twenty years before. Once they penetrated the thick new growth of young birch and poplar and came to the hidden spring where Leon had found Jennie on that day when their hearts first drew together to cling close forever after. They sat upon the boulder by the spring-side hand in hand, and they spoke of the road they had traveled together; and Jennie, though she had tears in her eyes, was very gay; and Leon was ever so proud. When they came back to the farm, Sam asked: "What makes your eyes shine so, Mother?" And Jennie caught her stocky son in her arms, and laughed and wept over him and cried:

"Thinking of things that happened before you were born or thought of, Son."

"You and Father do that more and more lately," Sam protested.

"It's the way of old folks, Sonny."

Sam laughed at her for that. "Old!" he derided, and she kissed him and showed him how he ought to stow the dishes away.

Leon, on these visits to the meadows where he had spent his youth—for he often trespassed now on the Dillard place, wandering about the upper slopes toward the woods, or down into the pasture lands behind the barn—found himself in the grip of an increasing nostalgia. It manifested itself in a vocal appreciation of the advantages of the location of Fergus' farm. "He was nearer town than we are, Jennie; and he's got it all in good shape. A good man could make it pay pretty well."

Jennie, too, felt the love of the farm where she had been a girl reawakening in her. "We must come down in the spring and picnic in the house here and do the farming together," she suggested. "I'll take off my shoes and stockings and work in the fresh earth and drive a harrow in the fields!"

After each such visit they went home more and more regretfully. Once or twice Leon saw Caleb; and once he spoke of this feeling and said he wished he were going to be so near the home place again. Caleb nodded. "Aye, yes," he agreed. "This will always seem like home to all of us, I expect."

Leon did not see Esther; and if she saw him it was from some hidden window, where she did not make herself visible to his eyes. Once or twice

he ventured near the farmhouse, hoping to encounter her. More and more, as he grew older, he regretted the estrangement between them. He had confessed this feeling to Jennie and she shared it. "You know I never did hold a grudge against Esther," she reminded him. "I always thought she just acted the way she thought was right for her to act."

"I hated her, for years," Leon confessed. "But I'm kind of getting over it now."

He was in this frame of mind when one evening Esther's letter came to him. It was so long since he had seen her hand that he did not recognize it, but the very fact that it was strange woke his curiosity. He opened the envelope, and glanced at the salutation and then at the signature; and he said in a low, startled voice to Jennie, who was near:

"It's from Esther!"

"Esther?" she repeated, and came to his side, with a quick instinct. "What's the matter?"

Leon read slowly aloud:

DEAR LEON:

I think it is my duty to write to you. It is about Sam, and I cannot see him going on the way he is without I should let you know. I think you'd want to know, and I think I ought to tell you. He's running around with Annie Maclure, and I think something ought to be done about it.

Caleb says you're planning to send him to college this year. If you are, you'd better do it. He needs somebody to look after him, living without anybody to tell him what to do.

He's out at nights to dances with her, and I hear tell that he goes to church every Sunday to see her. Then they meet up the Pond sometimes, when he goes fishing, I think.

I saw them in town together at a moving picture show tonight, and she was holding hands with him, and he put his cheek against hers. People were noticing them.

I felt as if you ought to know. He's a boy yet; and anyway, she's not the kind a Dillard ought to marry.

We sold Marshall's Meadows to Lee Motley today. I guess we'll get along better now.

You'd better do something about Sam.

He finished, and Jennie cried: "Isn't that just like Esther? Oh, you Dillards, Leon!"

"She just signs it: 'Yours Truly, Esther Dillard,'" Leon complained slowly.

"But she's written to you, Leon," Jennie pointed out. "That's something. That shows she'd come around if she had a chance." She put her arms around him. "I know how you've always wanted that, Leon."

Leon nodded. "But I'm kind of worried about Sam," he remarked.

Jennie laughed at him. "Worried about Sam! Don't you worry! Sam's all right! He told me all about this girl, and she's a right nice little thing."

"You never said a word to me," he protested accusingly.

"There wasn't anything to say. Sam likes her, that's all."

"He's got to go to college yet, Jennie."

"Why, he wants to go. You can have a girl and go to college too, can't you. I want my boys to have lots of girls. It's good for them."

"It bothers me," he confessed.

"That's the Dillard in you," she laughed again. "It's lucky I got hold of you, Leon, or you'd be just like Caleb now."

They reverted to the other angle, the fact that Esther had written at all. Her letter precipitated a discussion which occupied them far into the night. Each of them had known for days what was in the other's mind; each had been approaching the same conclusion. They found themselves together now; found their minds ready to contemplate a complete revolution in their lives with some composure. Before they slept that night, they had already begun to discuss ways and means; and three days later Leon replied to Esther.

DEAR ESTHER:

I had your letter and I was glad to get it.

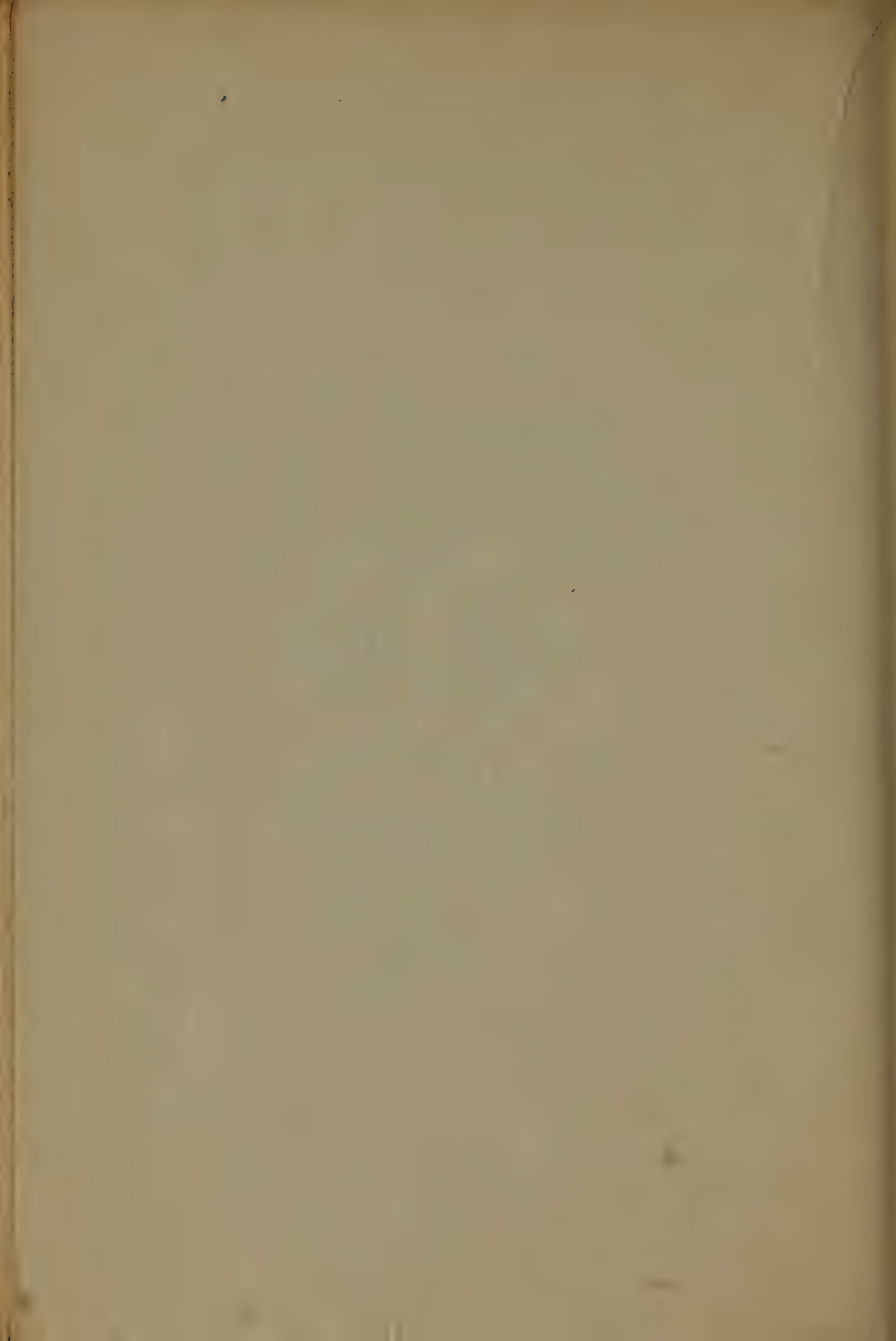
Sam is going to college. He's a good boy, and I'm glad you are taking care of him.

Jennie and I have decided to come back to her father's farm. I can sell this place here, probably at a pretty good price if I take my time. We'll move as soon as we get the apples picked here. I'd kind of like to sell before I move.

Jennie told me to thank you for taking care of Sam so good.

We're both glad we're going to be neighbors. I hope you are glad.

And he signed himself: "Your brother, Leon." Esther, for reasons not easily defined, kept that letter about her for a long time. It had never occurred to her that Leon and Jennie might come back to Fraternity; she contemplated the possibility with a mixture of foreboding and of pride.



## PART IV



**I**F one has been for a year, or two, or three away from Fraternity, and desires to put himself in touch with what has passed in the town during his absence, there is no readier means than to drop in at Will Bissell's store after supper and listen to the talk that goes forward there. At such an hour the men of the village and the nearer farms come to wait the arrival of the mail, and to make small purchases of flour or sugar or coffee or feed for pigs or fowl. At such times there is much small talk; the events of the day past are written into the oral record; each new rumor is sifted and classified; old tales are revived and aired again. If one but sits there for a night or two, he will find himself at the end of that time as familiar with the events of his absence as though he had never been away.

One evening in July, after a day of drizzling rain that had interrupted the hay crop, the usual group of men were assembled there. Jim Saladine from his farm along the ridge, and Chet McAusland on his way home from Ruffingham meadows with a string of trout, and Will Bissell himself, and a half a dozen others. Dr. Crapo stopped for a moment as he passed the store, and Will Bissell asked him how Caleb Dillard was. The doctor said Caleb was not so well; and Will nodded.

"He hasn't looked a well man in two years," he remarked.

"He's pretty sick," the doctor agreed. He added a little wearily: "I'm kind of discouraged about Caleb."

Jim Saladine had heard, and when the doctor was gone he said to Will: "Caleb's failing. He's lived kind of hard. He hasn't worked so mighty hard, but it's been hard work for him. Caleb wasn't ever meant for farming."

"I always thought selling the Meadows broke him up," Will remarked. "He's talked to me about it. Sometimes he'll kind of get started on it. I guess he's brooded quite a lot, thinking maybe he could have saved them if he'd done different."

"He's been abed for two months," Jim commented.

The storekeeper nodded. "I went over to see him one day," he said. "Passing by and stopped in. He's lost a lot of flesh. His neck is all fallen in."

"Caleb didn't have much to lose," Jim remarked.

"He looks bad," Bissell agreed. "But he's looked bad for two years, far as that goes."

Chet McAusland had joined them. He said now: "I run into him one day, down in Marshall's Meadows, when I was fishing the brook there. He was just setting under the gray birch by the backwater below the road, setting there and looking out across the meadows. I stopped for a spell and talked to him. That was along

last summer. He seemed a miserable kind of man."

"The Dillards always liked to hold on to their land," Saladine remarked. "I guess he felt bad, having the meadows go."

Bissell shifted the talk. "Motley ain't done as well with them meadows as I thought he would," he suggested.

"Lee's been sickly, too," Saladine reminded him. "The Meadows need a pile of work to put them in shape. Lee figured when he bought them he'd clear them up and cut out the young alders and the birches and seed the whole place. But he's had all he could do to home. I guess he's sorry he bought them now."

"I guess Caleb's sorry he sold," Bissell countered.

"Lee'd sell them if he could," Saladine said. "He as much as told me so, the other day. Here he can't even cut the hay on them this year, and it ain't worth while for anybody to buy it. I guess he'd be right glad to get rid of them. It's three years since he bought them, and all he's done so far has been to pay taxes on them. He ain't cut a spear of the hay."

A customer called Bissell away. Chet said more cheerfully: "The Dillard place is looking up, though. They've put that in pretty good shape, these last three years."

Saladine nodded. "Leon's done that. Oh, Caleb's worked all he could, but Leon and the boys have helped him a lot. Leon's a worker. He gets things done."

"He's an able man," Chet agreed. "He's made the Weir place about as good a farm as there is around here."

"He sold his apples for over eight hundred dollars, last fall," Saladine confirmed. "And he's well fixed now. He sold his farm up north last year, you know."

"I heard tell of that," Chet assented. "But I didn't hear what he got."

"I guess he got all of five thousand. Maybe more. It was a good farm. I expect he's worth twenty thousand dollars, right now." Bissell rejoined them; and Saladine repeated for his benefit: "I'm saying Leon's worth twenty thousand dollars, Will. Don't you figure he is?"

"He give eighteen hundred for the Mason place when he bought it for Sam," Will replied. "Eben Hobbs told me that much. Paid cash, too, Eben said. All he's got is free and clear."

"Sam's doing right well with it," Chet reminded them. "He's like Leon. He can make things work out for him."

"Jennie told my wife that Annie's baby was coming any day now," Will Bissell volunteered. "Sam's beginning to swell up already, like nobody ever had a baby before. He's a nice young fellow, though."

Will Belter had joined them, had overheard. "They say Esther took on scandalous before him and Annie got married," he said. "She was always one that liked Sam, though, even when he first come down here. I guess he got around her."

They made no comment on this. Fraternity

folk are careful what they say in Will Belter's hearing. But when Belter eventually moved away, they took up the subject again. Saladine reminded them that Esther had never forgiven Leon for marrying Jennie Weir. Bissell nodded. "They don't speak, even now," he reported. "Or at least, she don't. He was in the store here last week one day and she came in, and Leon kind of nodded to her. But Esther just acted like she hadn't seen him at all."

"Leon's running the Dillard farm though, along with his own," Chet told them. "Caleb being sick and all. He did the farming; and he's done the haying as much as he could already. But he don't go near the house."

"Esther always was the stubborn one," Saladine commented. "She used to say she'd never to speak to Leon if he married Jennie Weir, and I reckon she'll stick to it."

"Jennie's been a good wife to Leon, though," Bissell argued. "She's a good woman." He hesitated, thoughtfully. "I was at the house the night their Ethan died. Just two-three months after they moved down here and into the Weir house. I was right sorry for Jennie that night; and I was scared, too. She fought so. She had the little boy in her arms, holding him; and him choking all the time; and her eyes was blazing. Wouldn't let anybody else touch him at all."

The other two nodded; they had heard the tale before. But Bissell was absorbed in his own thoughts and pursued the topic. "I went over with some medicine that Andy'd brought from town," he explained. "Leon kind of wanted me

to stay, I thought. The baby died about eleven o'clock that night, right in her arms."

"She's made for mothering," Saladine commented.

"I kind of thought she wouldn't be the same after," the storekeeper said. "But since the new baby came, she's so tickled with him that she's more like herself."

"Named after Leon ain't it?" Chet asked.

"Yes, and looks the spit of him," Bissell agreed.

Other men had been coming and going. Gay Hunt drifted in and reported that Lee Motley was thinking of leaving town. They discussed this pro and con. Lee had been in ill health for three years; his affairs had suffered. Gay averred that Motley himself had spoken of his intention to depart. "He figured he'd go work in a mill," Gay explained.

Saladine doubted the story, since Hunt was known to be fanciful and given to exaggeration. "He might think of it," he remarked. "But he won't do it till he has to; and he don't have to as long as he's got them Meadows he bought from the Dillards. He can always sell them for something."

Saladine's opinion had weight; and most of the listeners were inclined to accept this view. The casual talk dwelt upon the Dillards for a while longer, then drifted to other topics. Just before Will turned down the lamps as a signal that it was time to close up the store, the telephone rang and he went into the rear office to answer it. Returning he asked:

"Anybody know where Doctor Crapo is?"

Someone thought he had gone along the ridge toward Union. Chet McAusland's farm lay that way; and Will said to him: "If you see anything of him, say Sam Dillard wants he should come right over, will you?"

Chet agreed. "Annie is it?" he asked.

Will nodded. "They're expecting the baby before morning," he explained.

# I

In the fall of the year when Leon and Jennie returned to her father's old farm to live, young Sam went to college as had been planned for him. He was at home once during the fall when his small brother died; again at Christmas time, and in the spring. During the following summer he labored mightily upon the farm before he went back to college again. But in the spring of the next year he came home unexpectedly and announced that he was done with college. "I'm going to be a farmer," he told Leon. "I might as well be getting at it."

Leon was grieved; but Jennie approved Sam's decision. "He can learn what farming he needs to know all the better for knowing he needs it," she argued. "Let him take a few hard knocks, and then he can find out the way to dodge them, and he'll remember it." So Sam had his way, and came home, and worked industriously, and it was a month later before they realized that not his desire to be a farmer but his longing for Annie Maclure had brought him home again.

They were married in midsummer, just after

the haying was done. Esther had done her dutiful best to prevent this consummation. She could not bring herself to speak to Leon; but she wrote to him, urging upon him the necessity of interfering; and when this did not suffice, she appealed to Dave Maclure and his wife with the argument that Annie was too young to be married. Caleb, living alone with her, had to bear the weight of her desperate resentment at the fact that the plans for the wedding went smoothly forward in spite of her. In the end she intercepted Sam herself, as he passed along the road, and tried to change his mind; but Sam, to her astonishment and somewhat to her dismay, treated her lightly and jocosely, laughed in a gentle fashion at her insistence, and left her feeling baffled and helpless. She refused to attend the wedding; and her old feeling against Leon was somewhat revived by the event; but curiously enough she had no abiding anger at young Sam nor at his bride.

Leon, who was proud of Sam and pleased with Annie for marrying him, bought back the Mason place from Eben Hobbs, and renovated the stout little house, which though it had been empty for so long still defied the weather, and gave it to Sam for a wedding present. The farm consisted of some seventy acres, lying in the angle of two roads, west of the Dillard place and north of the Weir farm. Eben had been forced to take it in satisfaction of his loans to Caleb and Esther, and he would have accepted a lower price than Leon gave him; but Leon calculated what it must have cost Eben in money and interest and taxes, and insisted on paying in full.

"I'd rather not think of you as losing anything by the Dillards," he had explained.

So Sam and Annie moved into the small house and Sam made a beginning at the task of reducing the farm to an ordered productivity once more. Annie devoted herself to making a home for him; she was an industrious little thing, and competent. Sam had never any cause to complain of her; and when he knew they were to have a baby, he was delighted beyond all measure with his bride. Through the winter his happiness at the prospect continued and increased; but in early summer of the year after their marriage he began to be more and more uneasy, and as Annie's time drew near he needed heartening. This night as he telephoned frantically to and fro in an effort to locate Dr. Crapo, he was terribly afraid and hid the fact from no one but Annie.

Annie had insisted upon staying in her own home to welcome the newcomer; so there tonight they all were gathered. When Dr. Crapo arrived he found them waiting him. Sam and Leon were together in the kitchen; Jennie and Mrs. Maclure were with Annie, in the front bedroom. The little farmhouse was all on one floor. After a word with Leon and his son, the doctor went into see Annie; and a few minutes later he brought Mrs. Maclure out. "I want you to take her home, Leon," he explained in good-natured tones. "She's just fretting herself around here, and bothering me. Now, Mrs. Maclure, you go home and go to bed and sleep, and you can come over and see your grandson along in the morning."

Annie's mother was desperately anxious to

stay; only the doctor's authority could have banished her. Leon had a weeping woman on his hands all the way home; he returned relievedly, and found that Sam had gone in to speak to Annie. Leon took up his vigil in the kitchen, and by and by Dr. Crapo and Sam came out to sit with him for a while. It had begun to rain; the drops slashed against the windows in a gusty and hilarious fashion. The two older men sought to divert Sam, who sat morose and frowning with his hands clasped between his knees and his ears attuned to every sound from the front room. Leon harked back to the night Sam was born. "I can remember it plain enough," he averred. "Mary was three years old, and she had the colic or something and cried all night long, me jumping her on my knee to keep her quiet. I didn't have time to worry much about Jennie. I remember Mrs. Weir had come up; and when she come out to the kitchen just about daylight with you wrapped in an old red blanket, she had to wake me up. Mary'd gone to sleep, and so had I. We were both good and tired."

"The husbands always give me more bother than the wives," Dr. Crapo agreed. "I've had men faint on my hands. Will Bissell's a pretty hearty man, but I remember when his first baby was born he went outdoors and fainted under some lilac bushes and I had to give him the last drop of whiskey I had to bring him to."

"I took the first one pretty hard, too," Leon assented. "I expect most men do. It's a scary thing; but it comes out all right. Kind of wonderful, don't you think so, Doctor?"

The physician smiled. "Yes, yes. It's the part of doctoring I always like the best. You see, you have something to show for your work when you're done."

He went away for a while, and Leon tried to lead Sam to talk; but Sam sat still and sweated nervously; and when he spoke his voice cracked, and when he laughed it was like a shriek. Leon said at last: "Come now, come. Get hold of yourself, Sam. Annie'll be wanting to see you, first thing you know. You've got to have a grin ready for her. You're whiter than a miller's hat right now."

Sam looked at his father wisfully. "Am I? I felt like it. Do you think she'll be all right?"

"Well, they 'most always are," Leon assured him gravely.

It rained all night; but after a while a gray dawn broke through the rain. Fergus, Sam's brother, came furtively to the door to ask if there was any news; and Leon bade him come in. Fergus hesitated.

"I just got up," he explained. "The chores ain't done. I thought I'd come over and ask."

"I'm going to make some coffee," Leon told him. "You can wait for that, I expect." He directed Fergus, with a glance, to speak to his brother; and the boy went over and struck Sam on the shoulder and cried:

"Hello, old timer! What're you so down in the mouth about, anyway?"

Sam retorted: "Oh, shut up, kid." And Fergus grinned at his father, who was busy at the cupboards. Leon called to his son:

“Hey, Sam, come and find some coffee for me. I don’t know where Annie keeps it.” He kept Sam busy while he built up the fire and presently had eggs frying in butter, and toast in preparation atop the stove. Dr. Crapo came out and applauded these preparations, spoke in a low tone to Leon and returned to his patient. Leon made Sam and Fergus sit down and eat. The doctor sent Jennie out for a moment; she kissed Sam and drank a cup of coffee and disappeared again; and her son saw how white and drawn she was, and was more afraid than he had been before. He could not eat; the eggs were tasteless; he mumbled them without knowing what he was about, swallowed them involuntarily. The scorching hot coffee had a bite to it which he found grateful, however; and he drained two cups. Then Leon made him bring fresh wood for the stove. It was raining harder than ever, and the wind blew searchingly, so that little streams of water whipped in around the window sashes and trickled spurting down. The light out of doors became sufficient so that they extinguished the lamp; but the resultant gloom in the kitchen was so depressing that Leon lighted it again, burning his hands in the process of removing the hot chimney.

About eight o’clock, Dr. Crapo came out, wiping his hands, and the sweat was streaming down his face. He was shaking with exhaustion. “You can come in and see her now, Sam,” he said mildly. “Can’t stay but a minute, and don’t make her talk. She’ll probably want you to kiss her. then you come right out again.”

So Sam went in and saw Annie lying in the bed;

and he thought she was so small. She smiled faintly at him, and patted his cheek with her hand when he kissed her. The boy was numb, felt no anguish of sorrow or pain; but he was quite sure that she was dying and that he would never see her again alive. He turned to go blindly back to the kitchen; but Jennie spoke from across the room.

"Don't you want to see the baby?" she asked. And Sam stared at her for a moment, and saw that she bent above a roll of blankets on the table there; and he crossed the room on tiptoe. He perceived now that sounds emerged from this bundle of blankets; and a moment later he looked for the first time upon the withered and contorted countenance of his son.

Jennie put her arm around him and took him out to the kitchen and assured him that Annie would be all right now. And when he was convinced of this, Sam's sandy countenance spread itself in a slow grin. He could not stand still. He went out into the barn and began with enormous energy to do the chores.

Fergus would have gone to help him; but Leon called him back. "Esther and Caleb will be anxious to hear," he told his son. "You run over and carry them the news."

## II

The return of Leon and Jennie to old Fergus Weir's farm had wrapped Esther in a mantle of isolation. This was her own doing; for though she had written to Leon to warn him of Sam's

affair with Annie Maclure, she very soon let him understand that she was not disposed to forget old scores. He came once to the house, came again; each time she sat in stony silence while he talked at lame length with Caleb. In the end, Leon came no more, nor did Jennie ever come to see her; for Leon would not permit this. Only the children occasionally stopped at the old Dillard homestead. Esther liked Sam until he married Annie Maclure; she was cold to him for a while thereafter, but melted at last and liked to see him and went to the length of asking Annie and Sam to Sunday dinner one day in early spring. Young Fergus was forever about the place; he had a sweet tooth to which she catered. He stood in no awe of his formidable aunt, and teased her or derided her as he chose. Caleb at first waited in some concern for the outbreak he thought must follow; but at last he came to understand that in Esther's eye Fergus could do no wrong. Caleb's namesake, who was by this time fifteen years old and taller than his father, with a countenance ridiculously like that of old Fergus Weir, was more serious-minded than his old brothers; he stayed at home and worked stolidly about the farm and felt a rancor against Esther which he imparted to thirteen-year-old Dora. The fact that Esther always had fresh cookies or home-made sweets waiting for them led these two to go to the house occasionally; but they were never at ease there, and never forgot that Esther hated their father and their mother. Leon and Jennie, of course, regarded Esther's contumacy without anger; Jennie assured her husband that his sister must melt at

last, but Leon professed a doubt of this. "Esther was always one to stick to her word," he was accustomed to say regretfully. "I don't look for anything from her."

So Caleb and Esther lived alone together; they did their daily round of tasks, and at night they lighted their lamps and read for a while, then went upstairs to bed. Caleb had become more silent as he grew older; he seldom ventured an opinion of his own nowadays. Since the sale of Marshall's Meadows he had worn at times the aspect of an old and broken man; and Esther understood that he felt a personal guilt in that connection, and had tried in vain to persuade him to a more philosophic point of view. He would listen patiently enough, but always came back to the same conclusion. "Spite of all a person can say, Esther, the place was here for me to handle, and I couldn't make it go, and you can't go back of that anyhow."

About a year before Sam's baby was born, Caleb had had a spell of sickness, an intangible ailment that sent him to bed and kept him there for a considerable time. It had come at the height of the haying season, and he worried because the work would not be done, till young Fergus assured him that the hay was cut and cured and in the barn. Thereafter he mended and was able to help with the apple picking, and to do the chores about the place; but in the winter he fell sick again, and Esther had to tend him. She did so slavishly, ministering to his wants before they were expressed, lavishing her strength on him in a fashion fairly desperate, as though she clung to

him and feared that he would slip away from her. It might have been expected that under these circumstances the brother and sister would draw more closely together; but this was not the case. Caleb was so penitently conscious of the extra burden of work which he laid on Esther's shoulders that he was constrained and ill at ease; Esther was so worried about him that she became irritable, and scolded at him even while she tended him most tenderly. Thus they were both miserable and alone; the only bright moments in their lives were those when Leon's children came for a little while to the house.

Fergus had, since Caleb's present illness, fallen into the habit of coming to the farm morning, noon, and night to do the chores. When for any reason he was unable to come, young Caleb grudgingly took his place. That morning, bringing the news of the birth of Sam's son, he tried the kitchen door and found it unlocked and went in, the rain streaming from his heavy coat and mud puddling about his high rubber shoes. Esther had a fire going and was cooking breakfast; she saw his entrance and cried irascibly:

"There now, Fergus; you stand right where you are and take off that coat and those boots. I'm not going to have my floor all wet and mud-died."

"I'm not coming in, Aunt Esther," he assured her cheerfully. "I just came over to tell you that the baby was born a little while ago."

She sniffed impatiently: "Well, babies have been born before. You didn't have to come traipsing into my kitchen."

"It's a boy," Fergus told, disregarding her ill humor.

"I don't care if it's two boys," she assured him; but he read a softening beneath the harshness of her words, and smiled again.

"How's Uncle Caleb?" he asked.

"He had kind of a bad night," Esther replied. "I declare, I wish Caleb could manage not to get me up all hours. Oh, he's patient enough, but I lie awake listening for a sound from him, and then of course I have to go in and see what the matter is."

"I'll milk the cows and get things started and then I'll go up and see him," Fergus decided.

"Well, you'll have to take off those boots if you do," she warned him; and as he opened the door cried: "Now don't stand there letting it blow the rain in. Go along."

Fergus went to the barn and busied himself there for half an hour, coming to the shed door of the kitchen once to fetch the milk pail. When he was through, Esther made him sit down and drink some hot coffee; and then she did ask more about Sam's baby, and how Annie was. She was pleased that the baby was a boy. "Sam told me last week if it was a boy they'd name it Nathan," she reminded Fergus. "That was my great-grandfather's name. The first Dillard that took up land here and made this farm."

"Sam wants it to be Nathan," Fergus assented. "Mother kind of wanted they should name it Dave, after Annie's father; but I expect Annie'll want the same as Sam."

"I don't know what's wrong with the name

of Nathan Dillard," Esther remarked. Her tongue had sharpened, during the loneliness of the last three years; her voice was not always so mild as it had used to be. "But I wouldn't expect your mother to know that," she added.

Fergus grinned cheerfully. He was always frankly amused at the continued ill feeling between Aunt Esther and his parents; and sometimes he joked Esther about it, but more often he retaliated in a fashion he had found always made her furious. He was at this time eighteen years old, and inclined to be shy; he had never paid the least attention to any girl. But he liked to boast to Aunt Esther of his conquests, because it made her so angry. He said casually now: "They had a good picture in town last Monday. I'd have taken you if I hadn't been taking a girl."

Aunt Esther sniffed. "You're likely to run around with any girl. Who was it?"

"Oh, she's spending the summer over in North Fraternity. Mighty pretty, too. You wouldn't know her name."

"You'll learn, time you're grown up, that you can't lie to me, Fergus. I don't believe you ever spoke to a girl."

"I kissed her good night last Monday night," Fergus asserted casually; and he persisted in the fable till in spite of her incredulity, Esther was disturbed and angry, and lectured him. He said cheerfully: "I'm going to get a pencil and paper sometime, Aunt Esther, and take down what you say, so's to remember it. Then I'll know what to say to you when these young men come hanging around you."

"I'd like to see one of them try it," Esther retorted. She was sixty-two years old; but she was so thin and spry and healthy looking that she seemed younger.

"Well, that was a nice-looking man I saw talking to you last fall," Fergus reminded her. He had once discovered her in conference with an itinerant peddler of kitchen ware, and had never let her forget the incident. "What did you do to him, to send him packing so?"

After a while she bade him go upstairs and see Caleb, while she washed the dishes; and Fergus went up to his uncle's room. Esther had already carried Caleb the news of the birth of Sam's boy; there had always been a close bond between Sam and Caleb, and the sick man was hungry for details now. He asked questions, listened in sober and thoughtful fashion to Fergus's replies, and then lay with eyes half-closed in long thought before putting new inquiries. Fergus, uneasy as young people are apt to be in the presence of sickness, sat beside the bed and watched his uncle's countenance with furtive eyes. He thought Caleb looked much worse than when he had seen him last, a week before; but when they had exhausted the topic of Sam's boy and he rose to go, he said slowly:

"You're looking better, Uncle Caleb."

Caleb turned slow eyes toward him and smiled a little; but he made no direct reply. Only he said:

"You ask your father to come see me, the first time he gets a chance, will you?"

Fergus promised that he would do so. Below

stairs, Esther gave him a packet well wrapped in heavy paper. "There's a little jacket I knitted for Sam's baby," she said. "You take it over. Tell them I'll be over, the first good day."

Fergus accepted the commission; and she made him stow the bundle under his coat to keep it dry. On the way to Sam's house, Fergus took pains to protect it; but he found his thoughts returning with some foreboding to his Uncle Caleb.

### III

Jennie was for a few days very much engrossed with her grandson. It was her first grandson, for though Mary and Mahlon Hull had two babies, they both were girls. The name Nathan was already accepted in the family, and Jennie was pleased; she had suggested that the boy, if it should be a boy, bear the name of Annie's father, simply because she thought Annie would like that. But Annie herself put the suggestion aside. "He's the first Dillard in the new generation," she reminded her mother-in-law. "I want him to wear a Dillard name."

"Esther'd love hearing you say that," Jennie said good-naturedly. "It's just the sort of thing Esther would say, if she ever let on there was such a thing as babies at all."

"She does admit it," Annie insisted. "He's got on the very jacket she knitted, right now."

So the baby wore from his first hours the ancient name; and his mother called him Nathan, and so did Leon. Sam was more apt to call his son "it"; or if his mood was jocular, to speak to

the infant as "old timer." Young Fergus always addressed his nephew as Nate. Jennie hung above the little crib bed from morning till night, neglecting her affairs at home, her own two-year-old tottering gravely at her heels. Once Annie, from where she lay watching, saw that Jennie was crying, and spoke to her; and Jennie said in a soft voice:

"Seems to me he looks the way little Ethan used to look." Then the two women wept in each other's arms till Jennie wiped her eyes and said she should be ashamed of herself to bother Annie so.

Jennie stayed at the house for a week, coming over in time to get Sam's breakfast and going home after supper. When Annie was able to sit up and be about a little, she relaxed her attentions, and Dora, who though she was only thirteen could do as much as most people, took her place. On the first Sunday, Mary and Mahlon drove down to see the first grandson; and Arthur Tuck and Aunt Dora came out from East Harbor. Jennie cooked a big Sunday dinner for them all; and afterwards they sat in the dining-room—the day was rainy—and talked endlessly, going over and over pleasantly familiar ground. Once Dora said: "I wish Caleb and Esther could be here," and Jennie assented with a glance, and Leon said slowly:

"I've got to get over to see Caleb pretty soon. He told Fergus he wanted to see me."

"We're going to stop in on the way home," Dora explained.

"I begged Aunt Esther to come," Annie said,

through the open door that led to her bedroom. "She was here yesterday, and I begged her to come over; but she said she had to take care of Uncle Caleb."

"One of the young ones could have gone over," Jennie argued; but they all seemed to feel this would have had no result, and no one took the trouble to reply. Only Leon said again:

"I've got to get over to see him."

A week later, Dora and Arthur came again; and this time they stopped to see Caleb on the way out. After dinner, Dora said to Leon: "Caleb told me to ask you to come over today."

Leon—they had drawn apart from the others—nodded ruefully. "I've meant to get over," he told her. "I have, for a fact. But I've been kind of busy. And Dora, Esther's always there."

Dora touched his arm. "I'll take Arthur, pretty soon, and we'll go and take Esther for a ride. Or I'll make Arthur take her while I stay with Caleb. You come while she's gone."

"I haven't seen him for a month, now," Leon confessed.

"He's right poorly, Leon," Dora told him. "I can see a difference, just since last Sunday. Doctor Crapo was there this morning, and he as much as told me Caleb was pretty sick." She spoke evenly enough—Dora had a painfully acquired poise—Leon saw her eyes abruptly fill with great tears which flowed down her cheeks. "I'm awful worried about Caleb, Leon," she said in that squeaky voice which emotion always lent her.

"I asked the doctor what was the matter with him last week," Leon replied. "I thought maybe

it'd do Caleb good to get away. He told me it wouldn't do a bit of good. Then I offered to get a doctor out from town; but he just said there wasn't a bit of use. He said Caleb had eat fried doughnuts and soda biscuits and baked beans too long." He hesitated, then looked at his sister with grieving eyes. "I kind of thought he meant maybe Caleb was going to die," he said plainly.

Dora hastily shook her head, dabbing at her eyes. "Caleb'll outlive the lot of us," she insisted. "But he wants to see you. He wants you should come over."

"I'll come," Leon promised gravely. "I'll surely come."

The little conspiracy was carried through that afternoon. Arthur and Dora left early; and Leon walked after them along the road till he could see the kitchen door of the great house that had been his boyhood home. He felt ridiculously furtive; when a car or two passed him he shrank among the alders out of sight and wondered what they thought he was about. But by and by he saw Arthur help Esther into the car and drive away with her toward East Harbor; and he struck rapidly toward the house. Dora had been watching from Caleb's window, and came downstairs to meet him in the kitchen. She whispered: "Now you cheer him up, Leon. He needs that as much as anything." Leon promised, and they went upstairs.

Caleb said, to Leon's question, that he was feeling better. "Yes sir," he insisted. "Better than I have for a month. I was out of bed for a spell this morning. Kind of weak, of course, but it

seemed good." There was an unaccustomed volubility about him which they found alarming. "I thought I'd get up and sit while you were here, Leon."

They helped him out bed and wrapped a quilt about him and set him in a great chair by the window. Caleb wore a nightshirt which came down only to his knees; and Leon saw how thin his legs were and how flabby and soft the calves had become. He felt a sick helplessness. In the chair and warmly wrapped, Caleb smiled at them as though he wished to reassure his brother and sister; and Dora, hovering about him, patted his shoulder and cried: "There, you ought to sit up awhile every day, Caleb. Just staying abed is enough to make you sick."

Caleb nodded. "Yes, that's right, Dora," he agreed. "Yes, I'll have to do that. Of course, some days I don't feel so well as I do today. It's perked me up to see you, Leon."

Leon said miserably: "I've a notion to come over every day. But Esther would take on, Caleb. You know she's just the same."

"She pretends to be," Caleb replied. "Esther don't give in easy, Leon. But she just wants somebody to make her. Esther's getting old and crotchety. She scolds at the youngsters when they come over; and Esther was never one to scold, Leon. She always talked so soft and quiet."

"That's right," Leon agreed.

"I expect if you just came over and didn't pay any attention to her, she'd come around," Caleb urged. "Just come over as though you'd always

been coming, and treat her the same as if you'd seen her every day."

"I'd do pretty near anything. It's not very comfortable, living the way we do. When she wrote me about Sam, I thought maybe she was ready to let up a little. Else I'd never come back here to live. But she's just like she always was."

"You come over and try it," Caleb begged. His eyes were full of pleading. "I kind of hate to think of you and Esther still mad at each other."

"Lord," Leon exclaimed. "You know better than that, Caleb."

"Well, her holding out against you, then." He was silent, and his eyes closed for a moment, and Dora asked:

"You tired, Caleb? You want to go back to bed."

He shook his head. "How are things going, Leon?" he asked at last. "With me laid up."

Leon laughed. "Why, with my boys around with nothing to do, there's plenty of hands to run things all right. They're keeping everything smooth."

"Esther needs someone. I can't do a thing."

"They do what needs doing."

"That's one reason I wish you could fix it up with her," Caleb explained wistfully. "Of course, I know I'm pretty sick. I have some pains sometimes that pretty near wrench me to pieces. Esther might need someone to take care of her right along. If she didn't have me." His voice was quite steady.

"Now Caleb, don't you talk so," Dora urged. "You know you'll outlive the lot of us. You're the kind that does."

"Why, I expect I will," Caleb agreed complaisantly. "That would be kind of funny, wouldn't it. But Leon, I just want to know that Esther'll be taken care of if she don't have me. If she needs it, any time. Oh, I know I don't amount to much. The work I did never hardly mattered. I could have held on to the Meadows . . . But she'll have to have someone."

"You stop worrying yourself," Leon insisted, his voice uneven. "You've always done all right, Caleb. Nobody says any different, or thinks it. I guess we've all done as well as we know how."

"I know," Caleb slowly assented. "Yes, I can't see that I can blame myself for any one thing. Oh, I've thought back, over the years since Father died. I've worked as hard as I could, Leon. But I might have known how to work harder."

"You did well to sell off the Meadows," Leon insisted. "They needed a lot of fixing up that you couldn't give them."

"I kind of hoped Lee Motley would put them in shape," Caleb explained apologetically. "I kind of thought it would be nice to see them all covered with a stout crop of hay, even if they weren't ours. But Lee hasn't done much. Not the way I hoped he would."

"You're worrying yourself too much, Caleb," Dora pleaded. "I wish if you could take things easier in your mind."

"Well, I get to thinking about Esther needing

somebody," he explained humbly. "That's all there is, you see . . ."

They perceived after a little longer that he was growing weary, and they put him back to bed and Dora made him comfortable. When it was time for Leon to go, Caleb called to him: "I wish you'd just try coming over, Leon. Just natural and easy. It would be nice if you could get along with her."

Leon said uncertainly: "Why, Caleb, I'll do what a man can." He bore away with him the memory of the pleasure which his words brought into Caleb's eyes.

Three or four days later he did indeed try the experiment. He was helping Sam in one of the fields on the Mason farm nearest the Dillard homestead; and he took the occasion to walk across the lower meadow to the house. Esther had not perceived his coming till he stood in the kitchen door with his hat in his hand. It was a dull, drizzly day with a little light rain falling and his garments were damp and smelled of the barn. He thought her nostrils wrinkled faintly as though he offended them.

"Morning, Esther," he said, in a tone that he strove to make matter of fact. She did not reply; and he said uncertainly: "Thought I'd say hello to Caleb."

She stood quite still, a cooking dish in her hands, a towel dangling. He took off his coat and hat and wiped his feet painstakingly. "Guess I'll go up and see him," he said.

Esther was like a statue; he passed her by with no glance nor other word and went up the back-

stairs to Caleb's room. Caleb's eyes lighted at sight of him. "Leon!" the sick man exclaimed. "Why it's mighty nice to see you."

Leon nodded. "I told you I'd come," he reminded Caleb, and his voice unconsciously fell to a low tone.

"Did you see Esther?" Caleb asked.

"Yes. Downstairs. She didn't say anything. Just stood there."

"She'll get used to it," Caleb insisted. "She'll be all right when you've come two or three times."

"I don't know," Leon replied uncertainly. He stood near the window; and Caleb saw that his eyes were fixed on something outside. The sick man asked:

"Who is it, Leon?"

Leon said slowly: "Esther. She's going down toward the road." A little silence held them, and Caleb's eyes clouded, and Leon added: "Well it's kind of raining. I can't keep her out there. I'll have to go."

"You come again," Caleb begged. "She's been bothered this morning."

But Leon would make no new promise. In the kitchen he donned his outer garments; outside he turned toward the road. Esther, rigid and immovable, sat on that boulder where she had seated herself more than twenty years before, on the day when he brought Jennie home as his bride. He went toward her, his eyes sorrowful; and when he came near where she sat he said:

"Esther!" She did not stir. "Esther, Caleb is mighty sick. It'd make him better, I think, if

he thought you'd—if he thought you had forgiven me." She paid him no heed. "You must see I had some right on my side, Esther." No sign. "You like the children," he reminded her. But when still her posture remained unchanged, he gave up the attempt and with a gesture of resignation moved aside.

"Go back to the house, Esther," he directed her coldly. "I won't bother you again."

She rose, without haste and without looking at him; rose and gathered her black skirts—dragged by the rain—about her thin legs, and passed him and went up toward the kitchen door. He watched her till she disappeared within doors. The rain came on a little more heavily; he brushed the hanging drops from the brim of his hat with a gesture of weariness and turned soberly toward his son's farm.

#### IV

Babies are born and old men die, for that is the cycle through which all life forever moves. Four weeks to a day after Sam's son came to wear the name of Nathan Dillard, Caleb Dillard died.

His death was at the end peaceful and serene. It did not come upon them without warning. He had some pain, an increasing weakness, a moment or two of anguish followed by periods of senselessness. Esther had lived long enough to recognize the approach of death, and Dr. Crapo confirmed her in her certainty.

She sent for Dora and Arthur Tuck and they came out from East Harbor and stood by Caleb's bed. He knew them, and smiled at them; and

Dora saw he wished to speak with her and bent above his lips. She heard Esther's name, and Leon's; and then Esther's again, in beseeching tones; and with her tears dropping upon his face she sought to reassure him. "We'll take care of Esther," she whispered. "We'll take care of her, Caleb dear."

A little later, he murmured so softly they could hardly hear: "I'd like to have kept the Meadows!"

Esther said in her firm, positive tones: "Now Caleb, you did all right. Don't you worry any."

He looked at her, and he replied surprisingly: "I've been sorry for you, Esther."

She put this aside with an impatient exclamation, scornful of any tenderness; but when he fumbled for her hand she gave it to him, and Dora saw that she was weeping.

A little after that, coma enfolded Caleb and he lay still and stark. Dora looked at Dr. Crapo, hesitated, then said to her sister: "I'm going to send for Leon." Esther seemed not to hear; and Dora, with a lift of her head, went downstairs to the telephone. By and by she came back upstairs, and a little later Leon and Jennie drove into the yard below. She descended to admit them and bring them to Caleb's room. Esther stood jealously by the head of the bed, would yield no ground at all; but she kept her head bent and her eyes on Caleb's countenance.

Their vigil, in the event, was a long one. Caleb lay for hours that lengthened into a day and a night and another day; and Dr. Crapo went away and returned and went away and returned again.

There was, he assured Leon, nothing to be done. Nothing but wait. Esther had accepted a chair which Arthur Tuck brought her; she kept her post by Caleb's side. Dora, flesh overriding spirit, had to sleep; and she caught brief snatches of slumber in the adjoining room. Jennie went home where there were so many calls upon her, while Leon and Arthur Tuck took turn and turn, resting when they must, returning when they could.

They did not know when he died. Dr. Crapo returned from an hour's absence and told them he was gone. Then at last Esther rose, and went with Dora into her own room; and the two sisters did not reappear. Leon went home across the pasture and up the ridge, and his weary feet stumbled over every inequality of the ground. Jennie met him at the door, and he nodded briefly and said:

"Yes, he's gone."

She put him to bed, wrapping him warmly; and he drank a great cup of chocolate which she made for him, and then slept for hours on end, a troubled and uneasy slumber. Once or twice he cried out in his sleep; and she hurried to touch his head and quiet him.

For a day the old Dillard house was dominated by the presence of Gorfinkle, whose function it was to do what needed doing for that which Caleb had become. There was the horror of the funeral, when muffled sobs and broken whispers filled the darkened rooms of the old house; then a service at the little church in Fraternity village, where many came to bear witness to the regard they had

always had for Caleb. He was a man without enemies as he was without intimate friends; a man whom no one could dislike; a man whom the village had been inclined to pity even while they respected the name he bore.

Afterwards the little journey up the hill to the spot overlooking the Pond on one side, and on the other looking toward the broad lands where Dillard's had always dwelt. The afternoon was sunny and fair and fine and the sun shone and the distant hills were richly clad in deep purple as though they wore mourning robes.

Dora and Arthur Tuck drove home with Esther; Jennie took Leon home and the tall boys in their unaccustomed and somber garb sat uncomfortably about while she got supper. When they were all abed, Jennie had to hold Leon for a long time in her arms. There were so many things, long unsaid, he wished he might say to Caleb now. But after a while, comforted, he slept beside her; and her love hovered over him protectingly.

V

The next day after Caleb's funeral, Arthur had to return to town; but Dora stayed on with her sister. Esther had been so strangely silent and contained that both Dora and Arthur thought her in need of some companionship. So Dora tried to be cheerful; she talked constantly and gaily and reassuringly, and avoided every reference to Caleb. But it was hard, since Esther remained entirely unresponsive. The two sisters rose in the morning and prepared breakfast, Dora loquacious, Esther speaking in the briefest fashion

when she spoke at all; they did the chamber work together and Esther's countenance was as still as though it had been graven in stone. Dora clung to her sister, would not leave her, tried in every way she could discover to break through the wall of reserve which Esther had reared between them.

She did not for a long time venture to speak of any material matter; but at length Esther's very silence forced Dora to the point. It was Friday evening and the dishes done; Arthur would come early next morning to take Dora home to East Harbor for her day of baking. "We'll both come back tomorrow night," Dora promised. "So you won't have to be alone. And I'll stay into next week."

Esther did not even reply. This was while they were putting the dishes away. When the last tasks were done, they sat down by the kitchen table with its red cover, somewhat patched and faded now, which had done duty for so many years. Dora's eyes were failing her of late years, she could do little in the evening that put any strain upon them; but Esther picked up her darning bag and went to work upon its contents as her long habit was. Dora, watching her, saw that she was darning one of Caleb's socks; and she tried to keep silent and refrain from interfering, but when she saw tears in Esther's eyes at last, it was too much for her.

"You oughtn't to do that, Esther," she cried. "There's no sense in working yourself all up so. Why don't you put his things away?"

"I always kept his clothes in order," Esther replied, a faint edge in her voice.

"I know you did," Dora agreed. "You always did. But that doesn't mean darning them now."

"They have to be mended before I can put them away," Esther insisted, and her eyes met those of her sister for an instant. They were full of such bleak and awful sorrow that Dora was silenced, could no longer urge the point. But a little later, the bonds of silence broken by the fact that she had mentioned Caleb at all, she went further.

"Esther," she asked. "Have you thought any what you mean to do, now?" Esther did not lift her head; seemed not to hear; and Dora argued the case for her. "You can't run the place alone, without any man to help you," she urged. "You know that well as I do, Esther. You were never one to work outdoors. You couldn't even milk the cows. You'd have to have someone. And there isn't any man you can hire."

Esther agreed mildly: "No, there's no one to hire."

"Of course," Dora suggested, "Fergus and young Caleb have been doing things around while Caleb was sick; and I expect they'll go right on doing them. So maybe you could manage that way."

"I didn't mind their helping Caleb out," Esther said sharply. "That was between him and them. It was his work . . ." She broke off and bent a little over her work.

"I know they'd be mighty glad to do it," Dora remarked. "They're an awful willing pair."

"That's no reason they should support me," Esther reminded her.

The sisters remained without speaking for a

while, and Dora weighed what Esther had said, and came to an understanding of what was in her sister's mind. She knew Esther's pride. To permit the boys to do Caleb's work was one thing; to permit them to do the work when Caleb was gone was another. The distinction might seem casuistry; nevertheless, Dora understood that it would have weight with Esther. But if Esther was not to have this help, what would she do? Dora could see only one solution; she said slowly:

"You better just come and live with us, Esther."

Esther did not at first reply; and Dora waited in some perturbation for her to speak. She was loyally fond of Esther; but she remembered well enough the unhappiness of their old life together to dread coming in daily contact with her sister now. Esther was hard to get along with, she thought; and her mind was busy with the details of her régime in the little house at East Harbor, wondering how Esther would fit in, even while she waited for her sister to reply. Esther must have guessed something of this, for she looked at Dora very gently before she spoke; and when she spoke it was to say:

"You're nice to me, Dora."

At this hint of refusal, Dora's secret relief made her seek to win Esther to assent. "You'd better come," she insisted. "You'd like, in town, Esther. So many things to see, and people to talk to. It's just the sensible thing to do."

Esther said slowly: "I have to stay here."

Dora knew that this was final; she understood the unspoken portion of her sister's reply. Esther

had lived all her life in this old house; when she ceased to live there her life would also end. This did not necessarily mean that she would die; but if she were summarily uprooted, torn from these well-loved surroundings, then existence would be desolate and drear. No, Esther must stay here; and in the end Dora accepted this fact, yet still wondered what Esther would do; wondered with a lively curiosity whether she would become reconciled with Leon. This was a question she dared not ask. They went to bed, and Dora lay for a while, busy with conjecture, before she slept at last.

Esther did not sleep so readily. Dora had forced upon her consideration the question she had now to face; and for her to face it was torture. Pride would always be the dominant note in Esther; pride of family, pride of place, and personal pride. This pride might be stubborn and senseless and blind; nevertheless, it was a part of Esther and she could not uproot it from her heart. The easiest way now would have been for her to remain silent; to permit Fergus and young Caleb to do the chores and keep the farm in order, as she knew they would do without word from her. All might go on as it had in the past months. She would see Sam and Annie and the baby, would see all Leon's children, but she need not see her brother or his wife. This was the temptation; to permit the boys to care for her, to accept their help without seeming to be conscious of it. But—to do so would be to surrender, and Esther was too proud to surrender without announcing the fact. If circumstances had forced her at last to

appeal to Leon, then Leon was entitled to weigh her appeal, to do with her as he chose to do. She was too proud, too honest to cheat him of this satisfaction. Her surrender was in character; it was a manifestation of her pride.

The thing itself was easily done. When young Caleb came in the morning to do the chores, Esther found opportunity to speak with him apart from Dora. She bade him ask Leon to come to see her at his first convenience that day. And after breakfast, when Dora and Arthur had started for East Harbor, she put all to rights and sat down in the kitchen to wait his coming. Her hands were folded across her waist with all their own precision; but if she had unclasped them, her fingers must have trembled, and there were tears gathering in her eyes. The day was fine; the sun shone warmly, and Esther liked a warm day. Her old blood was cold. She watched the patch of sunlight on the scrubbed floor, where the sun struck through one of the small windows. By and by Leon knocked upon the door.

Esther wished to rise and admit him; but when she made the effort her knees were uncertain and she dared not trust them; so she settled in her chair again and called to him to come in. Leon opened the door. Even in that moment she observed with relief that he had on clean clothes and that his shoes were free of mud. At least he would not track up her kitchen floor. He said from the doorway:

"Caleb told me you wanted to see me, Esther."

"Come in," she assented. "Come in and shut the door."

He obeyed her, and sat down in a straight chair across the table from her, leaning his arms upon the table. His hat was between his hands. "I'd have come before if I'd thought you wanted me, Esther," he said slowly.

She seemed to weigh this for a moment with bowed head; then she spoke, in words well measured. "I wasn't ready to send for you, Leon. I was trying to see some other way; but there isn't any other way that I can see. I can't run the place alone, Leon. You'll have to take it and run it."

Her voice was hard, almost stern; he had not the understanding to perceive that if she had not been hard she must have wept. Nevertheless, the agony in her countenance made him pity her; and he said gently:

"Why, you can get along, Esther. The boys will help you out."

"I didn't mind their doing while Caleb was sick," she replied. "But I don't aim they should support me now."

"They like doing for you, Esther."

"I've thought about it," she told him evenly. "It ain't a bit of good your going against me now." Her voice failed her, and she had to hesitate, then begin again. "If I could get along, I wouldn't have sent for you," she told him proudly. "But I can't get along; and the place has to be kept up. You'll just have to take it. You and Jennie. You could make something out of the farm. It needs a man; and I suppose Father would want you to come here, now that Caleb's gone."

She paused, but Leon did not speak. He was no longer looking at her, and his face was grave and troubled. After a while she spoke again, striving to hold her voice in check, fighting to hide from him the desperation of her need. "You'll have to come," she repeated. "You'll have to come."

She had said all she could bring herself to say; had asked nothing for herself, nor ever would. But she had entrusted the future of the Dillard place to him, put it in his hands, left it for him to dispose of it and of her as he would. She could humble herself no further, so now she waited, rocking precisely, her hands clasped across her waist till he should be ready to reply.

Leon sat silent, thinking. He had hoped when her summons had reached him to find some yielding in her; but he saw now this hope must be forever vain. Esther was as hard and as bitter as she had always been; there was no surrender of her spirit, there was only a submission to events outside her control. He had hoped she was ready to forgive the wrong he had never done; had been willing to accept any overture in an affectionate and welcoming spirit. The fact that she was still obdurate grieved him, even while he felt a secret respect for the persistence and the courage which he saw in her.

But he did not know what to say to her now. She was right, of course; the Dillard place needed a man to develop it. But he knew that if he and Jennie came to live here, Esther would never stay; and he could not evict his sister and leave her alone and forlorn. He sought some measure that

would provide for her, considered ways and means; and he was silent for so long that Esther began to tremble uncontrollably, and to stir in her chair till her movements drew him out of his abstraction. When he spoke at last, it was with a slow and friendly smile.

"No, Esther," he said, shaking his head. "Jennie and me, we're too old to uproot ourselves again. It was a wrench for us to move back down here, even if it was like coming home. But we're settled now, and comfortable. No, I guess we'd better stay where we are. I'd hoped you'd have changed by this time, Esther, or I'd have stayed away from the old place. I was hoping to find you ready to come half way, today. But I guess we're both too old to change much. We can't live under one roof, Esther, you and me."

She said, in a sharp tone that hid her terror: "You want I should give up the house to you?"

He shook his head. "You're best here, and we're all right where we are. But you do need a man. I'll tell you about that. Now you like Sam, and you get along with Annie. And I guess they've been married long enough so they can stand having older folks in the same house with them. Mahlon and Mary have got along with her folks. I guess Annie can get along with you. I'll talk to him. I expect he'd like to come and live here. You might put him in your will for the place when you're gone. I'd like Sam to have it. He's the oldest. I've given him the Mason place, so he'd have a good big farm, but he can handle it all right, and make it go."

He hesitated, and when she did not speak he added whimsically: "Then this baby of his will be growing up. He's got a good name. I'd like to see a Nathan Dillard settled here again. I guess you would, too."

Esther said, after a while: "It's for you to do as you like. I can't do different."

He took this as assent, yet he wished to leave her a fragment of her pride. "Why no," he urged. "The place is yours, Esther. I guess you could sell it for enough to keep you."

"Too much Dillard land has been sold already," she replied.

"Well, there's something to that, too." He rose, fumbling at his hat. "I'll talk to Sam," he promised, and moved toward the door.

She let him go without a further word; but when the door had closed behind him, the reaction swept her, and she buried her face in her arms, half-kneeling, half-lying against the table's edge. In the huge, bare kitchen where so many generations of Dillards had come and gone, her spare, black-clad figure seemed pitifully small and terribly alone.

She realized now that she had hoped Leon would come home and live with her. He was, at least, of her own generation. With Sam and Annie and the baby here, she would be simply an old woman among young people. The estate is a lonely one.

## VI

In September, Leon bought back Marshall's Meadows from Lee Motley, who was leaving Fraternity. Lee's health had failed, his plans had gone awry, he was glad to sell; Leon paid him principal and interest on the money he had put into the place, refusing to bargain. "It's Dillard land," he told Lee courteously. "I'll like to figure you just kept it for us for a while."

After Jennie, Esther was the first person he told of the purchase. If anything could move her, he thought, this must; but Esther received the news without emotion. Sam and Annie and the baby were already established in the big house; and Leon and Esther perforce saw each other now and then, but their intercourse was always formal; she never addressed him unless it were necessary, and when he spoke to her, her replies were short and to the point. She said now she was glad he had bought the Meadows. "I hated to think of them going," he commented, and she answered: "Yes!"

Turning away, he said: "You tell Sam when he comes in from the orchard, will you?" She promised to do so, then added formally:

"Sam and Annie want you all to come over to dinner tomorrow. Dora and Arthur will be out from town. Annie asked me to tell you."

He hesitated, then said: "All right, we'll come."

That Sunday dinner was, save for the absence of Mary, a reunion of the Dillards. Jennie and Esther and Dora and Annie all worked getting

dinner and getting it upon the table, and Esther was silently efficient, effacing herself, speaking only when someone spoke to her. For a while her attitude did cast a cloud over the gathering; but even Esther's displeasure could not permanently hold the boys in check. Fergus and Caleb began to tease her, and the others watched a little fearfully for the explosion. Esther did not explode, but she did bid them be more quiet. "Nathan's having his nap," she reminded them. "He's asleep right overhead. You want to keep quiet and let him sleep."

But Annie said: "Shoo! He's got to learn to have noise around. Sam and I are as noisy as anybody." They were all at table by this time. There were baked fowls for dinner, for Sam had insisted on keeping chickens and Esther had submitted with a humility which Leon found pitiable. Sam carved, and everyone ate heartily, and everyone talked at once.

Arthur Tuck asked Fergus how soon he would have a farm of his own; and Fergus replied that he was not going to be a farmer. "Don't be a lawyer," Arthur advised. Fergus laughed and said he did not intend to. Jennie told them proudly:

"I think he'll be a doctor. He likes talking to Dr. Crapo, and Dr. Crapo says he'll make one. He's going to Maine next year, he says."

"Caleb thinks he'll raise apples," Leon told them, looking toward his younger son. "I've still got an orchard up north that I didn't sell. About three hundred trees. And some good land, with a southerly cant on it. He wants I should go up

with him next summer and put in some more trees. I don't know but I will. Apples will be a good crop before many years, and Caleb'll make an orchard man. He can put in a little tree and see it full of apples when it ain't any more than a switch stuck in the ground."

"That's good apple country up there," Arthur agreed; and Caleb said slowly:

"I'd rather put college money into apple trees."

Jennie commented: "It'd kind of please me to have one of the boys up there where we lived while they were youngsters. And of course it's home to them."

They spoke much, during dinner, of Marshall's Meadows, and of the fact that they were back in the family once more. Leon said he planned to get to work that fall in his spare time, putting them in condition. "They need a lot of going over," Leon admitted. "But there's no better hay land, and hay's the biggest crop we've got up here."

"It don't bring the money there is in apples," Caleb argued.

Leon smiled at his son. "Well, it brings in some every year, if you've got enough hay land," he reminded the boy. "And in a bad year, you get a good price to make up for it. That's more than an orchard will do."

He and Arthur discussed the details of the work to be done upon the Meadows, while Jennie and Annie brought fresh victuals from the kitchen; and Esther listened without seeming to listen. Her thoughts were weary ones. There had been a

time when she was a girl and as full of plans as these young people were now; but to what a weary fruition her plans had come.

It was Annie who heard the baby's first cry. She fled up the stairs, calling: "Mama's coming dear. Mama's coming right up." Jennie followed her, and the two did not return for a time. Esther and Dora cleared the table while they were gone, and brought on the pies and cut them. Then the two mothers came downstairs and Annie bore her baby in her arms and showed him to them. Dora wished to hold him and was permitted; she sat in a low chair, alternately hugging the little bundle to her breast and laying it across her knee so that they all might see what a wonder it was. Annie crooned over it, and tried to make the baby call her "Mama," while they all laughed at her and reminded her the child was scarcely two months old.

It was Arthur Tuck, looking down at the squirming thing with grave eyes, who put into words the thought they all had.

"Well," he said, "there's a Nathan Dillard, if his grown folks keep on, will have more of a farm around here forty years from now than the first Nathan Dillard ever had."

After a while Annie made Aunt Esther hold the baby, and Esther did it gingerly, and gave it back again with some relief, withdrawing into the silence she had worn like a garment all that day. It was as though she were not a member of the family at all; rather a stranger condemned to live among them without being one of them. Dora kissed her, when she came to say good-by, and

Esther felt the pity in that kiss, and stiffened under it.

She would always be proud; but she would always be very lonely too.

## VII

To grub out the alders and the young poplar and birch growth which had encroached upon the Meadows would be a labor best done in the spring, when the earth was soft with frost. "I'll put the tractor down there and yank them out," Leon said. "That part can wait. We'll do it as we get time."

Another part of his plans was to straighten the course of Marshall Brook, where it meandered through the lowlands. "Take out the bends and maybe cut her a little deeper here and there and it'll make a lot of new land for us," he explained to Sam. "That's a job we can get at right away."

They began where the brook disappeared into the Pond lot, now coming up to new growth. A marshy deadwater there was drained by putting a charge of dynamite into an ancient ledge; two or three wide bends disappeared when they cut ditches across the neck of land and threw the excavated earth into the old bed of the brook, leaving the water to scour out its own channel. Little by little, in the crisp fall days after the apples were picked and sold, they accomplished their end.

About a dozen rods below the bridge where the brook crossed the road, the course of the brook curved from an easterly direction toward the

north; and on the inner side of this curve the bank had long ago fallen away, leaving an irregularly shaped pool. The current flowed along the outer curve; within an angle of the bank there was an ancient backwater, where little bits of wood and fragments of scum collected and moved slowly around and around upon the almost stagnant water. Sometimes a fragment of drift caught here revolved upon itself in a monotonous and dreary fashion until it became water-soaked and sank to the bottom, to become embedded in the oozy mold there and rot away.

Leon decided that by making two short cuts he could swing the main stream from a bend above through this deadwater, straightening its course over a distance of a hundred yards or so. He drove stakes to mark the cuts, and he and Sam and Fergus worked for a day or two, delving in the heavy soil. While they worked, the water downstream was turgid and yellow, but at last a final cut gave the current free passage into the backwater and it went scouring through, sweeping away the scum, the drift, and the mold upon the bottom.

Watching the results of his labors, Leon said to his sons: "I'm glad that's done. The water in the backwater always looked kind of stagnant and unhealthy to me. I like to see a stream run straight and clean."

One on either side of him, they nodded in sober agreement. "Yes, sir," Sam assented. "It does look healthier now."

It was late afternoon, and they turned up toward the road. Sam went home to Annie and the

baby and his supper; Leon took the longer way to where he knew Jennie would have a kiss for him, as she had always had, for more than twenty years. Behind them, the Meadows seemed already to feel the stir of newly awakened growth; beneath the dead brown grass of the last summer, there was a yeasty turmoil in the earth, as though it wakened to take up a vigorous life again.

THE END



